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into English schools (and why it matters to us)**

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**Pandering to The PANDA: The introduction of Threshold Policy and Performance Pay
into English Schools (and why it matters to us)**

ALAN PRITCHARD

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education in the Faculty of Education.**

May 2004

44,829 words

Abstract

Classroom teachers with at least six years' experience can now apply to go onto an Upper Pay Spine that recognises their individual performance. Eligibility for the Upper Pay Spine is assessed by Heads who review evidence provided by the teacher in a formal application. It is effectively a change to the conditions of service with the process managed by individual Heads working to a National Framework. This 'Performance Threshold' was first introduced in 2000 and most applicants were successful, receiving an immediate pay boost of £2,000 with the entitlement to seek further 'performance' payments. For the first time, a differentiated pay scale and process for classroom teachers which tags teacher performance to pupil performance was recognised in a national structure.

This dissertation is a personal and collective narrative of how I and five colleagues managed the introduction of the 'Performance Threshold'. This narrative is our experience of implementing the policy at a local level after receiving mandatory training from private contractors which was delivered nationally in the Spring of 2000. In that sense it is both unique and potentially representative though I make no claims to the latter. It tells of our experience of what this part of Labour's 'modernising' agenda means for Headship and schools. We have reported on our understanding of what has happened and is likely to develop from this policy in order that a 'voice' is given to Heads who are working to make sense of the contradictions and dangers contained in this policy. I believe this research on performance pay for teachers would suggest that it will change the culture of teaching and that 'individualism' may well backfire and not deliver the status and rewards claimed for it. Rather it may well strengthen the current preoccupation with regulations and measurement.

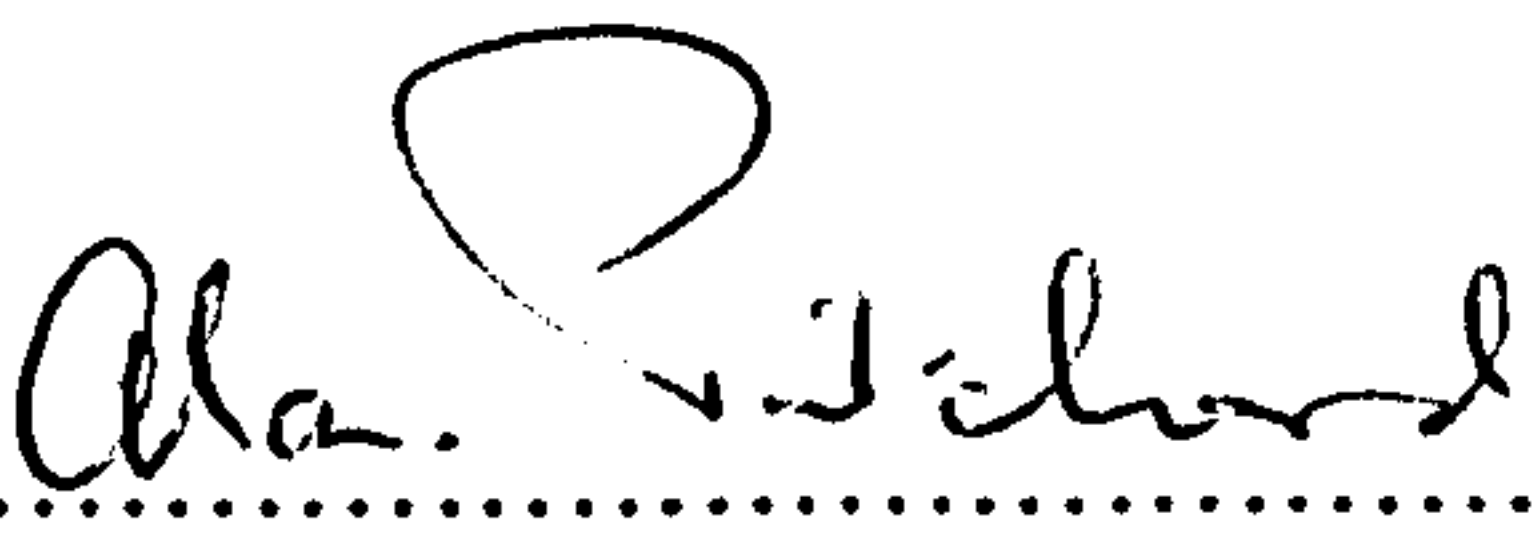
The work suggests that in order to 'modernise' teacher employment, the Government is ignoring traditional LEA structures by controlling and administering policy directly from the centre to each school. This approach will speed up the change process and also places the Minister as direct controller and funder of a significant cost to schools. This is the start of new working arrangements for teachers with Heads being the 'gatekeepers' of the new system.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This work would never have been completed without the unstinting support of my supervisor Professor Susan Robertson, the considerable help of support staff at the Graduate School of Education, my fellow Heads and the constant help of my long suffering wife, Helen.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed 

Date 4th May 2004

Contents

| | |
|----------|--|
| Shard 1. | Prologue – page 8 |
| Shard 2. | Sniffing the Air – page 19 |
| Shard 3. | A Methodology for Researching the Threshold Process – page 35 |
| Shard 4. | Trials, Tribulations and Techniques – page 46 |
| Shard 5. | People, Places and Politics – page 69 |
| Shard 6. | A Grand Day Out and An Unexpected Day Out – page 85 |
| Shard 7. | Confusion, Caution and Collusion – page 106 |
| Shard 8. | How We Stumbled Across the Threshold but Remained Fearful of the PANDA – page 129 |

List of Tables

1. Structure of Meetings – page 61
2. Application for Threshold Round One 2000 – page 106

Appendices

- I Threshold Standards – page 160
- II Sample Group Interview Schedule – page 162
- III Sample Individual Interview Schedule – page 164

References – page 166

**Pandering to the PANDA: The Introduction of Threshold Policy and Performance
Pay into English Schools (and why it matters to us)**

Shard 1

Prologue

The Threshold Process matters a great deal. It matters to me because it is changing the way I work and that belief has sustained me during the struggle to complete this research. It matters to my colleagues, five other Headteachers who have worked with me on this research for my dissertation. It matters to the Government because it was the first stage of modernising and reforming the teaching force; for that reason Threshold had to be successfully implemented and secured whatever the circumstances. Modernising has included creating a framework of National Standards to cover the totality of a teacher's career from induction to Headship. Threshold Assessment is one of these standards and is part of a policy to manage career progression and the basis of remuneration. To cross the Threshold and receive higher pay, applicants must provide evidence of competence in eight standards groups in five areas (Appendix I). This standard is only applicable to experienced teachers outside the Leadership Group so it is always likely to be the standard most used as it will be relevant to the largest sub-group of the teaching force.

Teachers, for whom it should matter, appear less excited about it and see the £2,000 extra they are paid if they succeed in crossing the Threshold as a pay rise without strings. Perhaps their lack of questioning is the result of more than 20 years of change in the system. Perhaps it is because they are tired of fighting. Whatever the reason, I believe these teachers are misguided. In this research I show that engaging with and implementing the Threshold process application is acceptance of performance pay and a central measure of that performance is pupil progress referenced directly to OFSTED data through a document called the PANDA (Performance AND Assessment). This is

an annual summary of examination performance using data sourced directly from examination boards (that implies trust issues). It grades schools from A* to E*. A* is the highest and E* the lowest. It shows each school how they have performed compared to national levels, similar schools (based on Free School Meal numbers) and, since 2003, prior attainment. It is a platform for inspection and also a required document for Threshold assessment. The PANDA has spread its influence from the institutional to the individual teacher level. In this dissertation I will be arguing that we now pander to The Threshold; it is a control mechanism. This dissertation is an unfolding story; it describes the experience of Heads implicated in implementing the policy. It also describes a policy that changes over time.

It matters to me that OFSTED is an unelected body concerned with regulatory functions, both distanced from accountability to elected politicians but working for the Government. The traditional pattern of accountability with LEAs and local politicians has been ignored. This is part of the New Public Management as public services are restructured. The New Public Management uses regulatory bodies such as OFSTED to control schools and teachers and the nature and conditions of work. Robertson has used the term 'fast capitalism' (Robertson 2000 p7) to describe the broad features of this new social settlement; it is one that has replaced the universal interests associated with the welfare state policy with those that promote individualism and self interest. Robertson argues that this represents a shift from 'Trusteeship' to 'Entrepreneurship' (p. 193). Threshold is part of this changing situation. New Public Management challenges the concept of altruistic professional service by offering rewards to those who 'do well' when compared to others rather than 'doing good'. The PANDA offers comparison measures and Threshold translates these comparisons into a cash reward. Tracing this shift out as it affects the lives of teachers and Heads in a cluster of schools, as well as

understanding the implications of this move for schools in general is the impetus for this research.

Over 18 years of Headship I have learned to accommodate and manage the pressures of change and new ways of working. Despite the changes, I want to argue that at the heart of the organisation we have retained some sense of professional autonomy and a mutually supportive culture. However, Threshold has the potential to destroy that culture. I still think of myself as a teacher, one of a team but Threshold could destroy that. Threshold will require me to put teachers through hoops and then keep them jumping through hoops to be rewarded with pay rises. However, I also know that if financial rewards were their main motive they would not be working as teachers. Threshold is about complying with a set of Government requirements, proving that you do so and then being rewarded by the Head. This is not about professional leadership; it is about forcing compliance with a new set of demands as to how we work. I feel as if I have become the foreman and my teachers become factory hands. The way we work is now changed.

In this research I decided to work with five other local Heads so that a wider than one institution experience was examined and a collective view gathered from our community. These were Heads in my local consortium of schools. It seemed to me that the Threshold would be different in different schools despite the fact there were national guidelines. By working with my colleagues who could be located at varying points along the continuum from 'Trusteeship' to 'Entrepreneurship' I would give a richer picture of the phenomena, the experience of Threshold. This research is my own work, though the data has been reviewed with the research subjects. It is indicative of a low trust environment where quasi market pressures exist that the subjects have sought

anonymity to protect themselves and their schools. Their willingness to assist me, confirmed in writing, is tempered by a local competitive education market. Six voices allow me to say more than one could. I was also keen that this research was about creating a space so that I/we could say something. In so doing I created a number of research problems for myself. Biographical research has been described as filled with problems about the factual status of material, its retrieval and use (Smith 1994). My problem was that at times this was 'my' research, at other times it was 'ours'. My way of dealing with this was to represent my own views and findings by using 'I' to signify that this was me alone. However, where there had been collective work that had been shared 'we' or 'us' would be used. It is not the clearest format for the reader but it enables me to present valuable shared data whilst taking responsibility for the overall project as this was my dissertation. Gergen (2003) and Lathers and Smithies (2003) have both shown that is possible to handle these multiple voices in narrative. I became the outward looking researcher while much of the group work was inward looking as we wrestled with the collective challenges of Threshold stories. For that reason I am calling the stories shards. I want this idea to work at two levels. First, the 'mirror' representing a unified teacher culture smashed by Threshold. And whilst we can still use this mirror, the reflections are distorted. The variable fragments represent the undermining of collective interests and increasing individual competition for the best bits of the 'mirror'. Secondly, a shard is a description of ice formations. Post Threshold, teaching is like a frozen lake starting to thaw. The ice is melting at different rates and the surface is changing at many points. Eventually the integrity of the surface will disappear and be broken into individual, isolated sheets of ice. The project shows the synchronic moment and reports the diachronic change in the ice over time.

These images have encouraged me to use a different way of writing. I want to produce as a truthful and an authoritative account of the process as I can. The narrative is a vehicle to provide a critical account, constructed from my work and the stories of the other Heads. I am constructing the narrative of how Threshold was experienced in these schools.

During the research I have also been exposed to other researchers. These researchers, including senior university researchers, showed me great kindness and co-operation. They allowed me to attend seminars and sent me papers when appropriate. For someone not used to such openness it was liberating. Research received in schools is often to prove that we can do more with less, or that a particular approach to teaching will improve results. An outcome I would welcome from this research is that my findings add to the understanding of the Threshold process when placed alongside other research. I found that level of collegiality that is under attack in schools from other researchers.

So why does Threshold concern me and why should it concern us? First, there was a sense of disappointment. Twenty five years after the Ruskin speech of Callaghan (18/10/76); the New Labour administration was nearing the end of its term by continuing with the regulatory methods of the New Right. It might not be the imposition years of 1987 to 1996 but the style of the officially sponsored pedagogies (Furlong 2001) was still impositional. Having lived through the Grant-Maintained policy period and the apparent threat of selection being reintroduced (Major's a grammar school in every town), I felt we deserved better from a new Government. They seemed less 'transforming' or 'modernising' and more directing and enforcing than expected. Teachers had anticipated a new direction after the launching of

'Excellence in Schools' (1997) in which the Government had said that by 2002 there would be:-

- Effective appraisal arrangements for teachers and Headteachers (p7)

We should have been alerted by the next bullet point:-

- Streamlined procedures for dealing with incompetent teachers (p7)

This was a management agenda, not a professionally-orientated development agenda.

This agenda can be detected in both the documents and the nature of the language that was used.

The language of the various documents that preceded or supported Threshold Assessment is revealing. The technical paper that accompanied *'Teachers: Meeting the challenge of change'* (1999) contained a number of statements that are difficult to reconcile:-

“.... to improve the image, morale and status of the profession.”
(p. 2 Estelle Morris foreword)

“taking into account both the nature and quality of their personal performance and the importance of their post”.
(p. 3 Executive Summary)

While page 2 talks about the profession, on page 3 the focus is on individual performance. The same document leaves us with the feeling that this is about individuals and not the whole profession. For example:-

“greater rewards and faster progress for the best teachers”
(p. 5 Introduction)

The undefined description ‘best’ undermines the structuralist nature of the process or any claim to objectivity.

“linking increased rewards to good performance and permitting the best teachers to progress faster”

(p. 8 Performance Management Section)

The hard-edged parts of the policy emerge soon enough:

“the inclusion of targets related to pupil performance”

(p. 8)

“the use of appraisal outcomes to influence pay decisions”

(p. 9)

So this was not about all teachers, it was about some teachers and some outcomes from their teaching aligned to an unqualified ‘best’ though that ‘best’ had a link to measured pupil progress. Just in case we missed the point that funds should be found to reward the ‘best’, OFSTED was given the task of inspecting Performance Management to see:-

“how Governing Bodies exercise, on the advice of the Head the discretion available to them to determine the pay consequences of appraisal and threshold assessments”

(p. 35 Funding Mechanisms)

OFSTED would be checking to see if the right teachers were being rewarded. Our work is on one hand being changed from the centre, and on the other inspected to regulate the changed behaviour.

The theme was repeated elsewhere, especially in *‘Schools: Building on Success’* (2001).

In the section entitled Creating New Career Paths, staff could be:-

“promoted to a new pay scale”

(p. 19)

have access to:-

“higher salaries and better prospects”

(p. 20)

Of course, this only applied to 'good teachers' (p. 20) whoever they were. In *'Teachers: Meeting the challenge of change'* (1999) the document reminded us that even if a teacher decided not to pursue threshold assessment they could still harm the income of colleagues by ruining the chance of a School Achievement Award. This was the pay bonus for staff in schools achieving rapid improvement or excellence. Rapid improvement or excellence was defined by examination results. The data with high status is linked to national targets by which the Government represents its own success. School Achievement Awards reinforce the national targets.

This was not the culture of my workplace; my school. In my school we worked together as a community of professionals. We had an identity that was about our community. We had tacit views of what our professionalism was about, how it occurred, who owned it, what we valued. It was through these culturally-mediated approaches that we defined 'our' school life. While accepting that this had been challenged by changes such as the National Curriculum, I still believed we were a unified body. Bruner (1996) has described how continuity of identity and a culture of super-organic individuals is secured by symbolism stored in a shared understanding by the community. It is how we find our place in the world. If we shared this culture, how could we adopt a different culture where performance management, or, more accurately, performance pay made us rivals? What was the definition of 'best' or 'good' held by the Government and how did it fit our understanding of the world of teaching? My impression was that it did not. My professional (and gut) reaction was that Performance Pay was likely to make technical proles of us all. It was an 'off-the-shelf solution', borrowed from a different culture to encourage improvements, particularly in examination results.

This was a spur for my work, together with my anger at a Labour Government introducing market solutions borrowed from what we called the New Right when I had in fact expected them to introduce a new approach to education. In the simplest of terms, Threshold Assessment is undertaken voluntarily by teachers who have been at the top of the main pay scale for at least a year who can provide evidence that they perform at or beyond agreed criteria. These criteria, set outside schools, are concerned with identifying teachers who perform at a higher level in turn entitling them to better pay. As this process became clearer throughout my research, my conclusion was that teachers were entering into a new set of working arrangements. For extra pay they were prepared to put themselves forward as 'better' than others, to accept a link to pupil progress described, in part, by data provided by OFSTED. Unwittingly they were colluding in creating local pay arrangements and accepting that they would (if in receipt of management allowances) sit in judgement on others. Management postholders appeared to become an internal regulatory force using OFSTED (PANDA) data to inform their judgements. This was so alien to my understanding of professionalism that I wanted to research and record my experience. To overcome concerns of parochialism and provide richer data I involved five other Heads. From that I have produced a reflexive and critical account of what it was like for me/us to implement and mediate the experience of Threshold at Headship level. Our location is a semi-rural county. My account of the experience has been built up within that location and is showed necessarily as a partial account.

The starting point for my research design and this dissertation was to understand how Threshold emerged as Government policy. I then designed a methodology and set of research techniques that would enable me to collect data from the field. To help the reader make sense of the locations involved in the research I have provided a view, both

personal and negotiated, of the participants. The research drew six Heads (myself and five others) into a debate/discourse about the nature of Headship. The collective voice was not always unitary as we did not always agree. However, we did agree on the account that might be told, which was in turn given to me to use.

My final section is concerned with conclusions. These reflect my own more personal views (as opposed to those of the group) and our understanding of the Threshold experience. Threshold represents a new set of terms and conditions of service for teachers. My worry is that this will have a substantial impact on the way we perceive professional expertise. There might be little or no room for those activities which cannot be measured. Such measurement, in turn, has greater validity if scaled against the regulatory data of the annual PANDA. Data provided externally has become central to judging teachers. The data is described as a management tool. Gewirtz (2002) has urged teachers to resist managerial language and instead promote social justice by reclaiming the terms used to describe our work. That advice might well be too late because Threshold has embedded 'evidence', 'claims' and 'verification' into the working life of teachers. These are not terms concerned with social justice; rather they are terms which describe practices such as auditing and measuring. They are the soul mates of regulation and control. Michael Power (1997) has written about this in his description of the growth of regulatory bodies. Hood et al (1999) have said that those regulatory bodies are consuming the extra funding in education to pay/provide consultants and generate extra paperwork. Extra spending on education may not mean more funds for the classroom.

I hope that this account of what it was like to be in the centre of implementing Threshold will add to the body of knowledge about the changing direction of education.

The obsession with examination results and the coercive methods used to make teachers improve those results are found in the Threshold. One day we might describe teachers as high grade, low grade or perhaps even super teachers! Someone needs to realise that schools are a collective endeavour shaped by the actions of talented individuals. Schools are not places where one individual can change everything, we all need co-workers. Has no-one in Government learned the lessons of 'superheads' who alone were believed to be capable of changing failing schools into successful schools and as such were paid significant salaries but appear to have made little difference, or is the philosophy of individual rewards (greed?) fixed in the political mind? The teachers I know do not, in the main work like that. But Heads are under the 'cosh' to implement such a system. This is both my, and our story.

Shard 2

Sniffing the Air: Taking Stock of the Threshold Environment

Animals sniff the air to gather information about the environment. Before advancing into new territory or open spaces they stop and use their senses to establish an understanding of what might be going on. The act is about caution, measuring, listening and considering. It is about judging the state of the world. This shard seeks to take stock of what might be going on. Before starting the main research process I needed to make sense of the environment that had fostered and permitted the Threshold Process to emerge. Initially I thought that after years in opposition, the election of a Labour Government in 1997 would signal the emergence of a new socially progressive era for public services. Soon I realised that was too simplistic. A new administration was making changes, but those changes had deeper roots that had travelled across governments; they were, in part, a re-packaging of beliefs that had been in government circles for over 30 years, that professional people can be motivated by financial rewards. The air contained much that I did not sense until I paused. Just as an animal picks up a myriad of signs in the air and assesses them as a totality, I tried to take stock of the changing circumstances created by the combined factors of Threshold Performance Management and Pay as a totality. This was an attempt to define my 'knowing' before designing a methodology.

This was not intended as a literature review. Instead I wanted to outline my understandings of why we were at the point of the Threshold Policy, to incorporate some of the early research writings about the policy, but then introduce other research findings later. This was about my assessment of the environment at the start of the process and during the early stages. I was aware that other people were researching this

process and that their work would be used to test, measure and reflect on my understandings. These were the issues concerned with performance that were in my mind as I stated to work with my fellow Heads in implementing the process. It was a state of affairs I believed existed as we started to enact the requirements of the Threshold Policy. It was what I could see from my position as a Head.

The concept of Performance Related Pay is not new to education. After the Newcastle Commission of 1861 the Revised Code of 1862 paid teachers by results. Those results were assessed by visiting inspectors (British Parliamentary Papers 1861). Victorian England did not trust teachers to do what they said they would do, the issue of trust continues to be important today. The system existed until the 1890s, but was derided for distorting the curriculum. The incentive for the Victorians to introduce this system was fear of the growing economic strength of Germany. Having abandoned 'Payment by Results' as a failure it is ironic that the next move to improve teacher performance on a national basis should also have an economic imperative.

In the late 1970s the Labour Government of James Callaghan had concerns about the education system's ability to deliver the work-force required to maintain or improve economic performance. This showed itself in the 'Ruskin Speech' and the 'Great Debate', both of which insisted that the education system was not effective. In 1977 a Green Paper was introduced to establish procedures for the assessment of teachers' performance. Whilst this was described as 'appraisal' the intention was to manage and direct teacher performance. Threshold's linkage to this previous Labour Government has been overlooked. Callaghan wanted teacher reform but ran out of political power and time. His successor, Margaret Thatcher, was determined to make changes to state education. For her, Callaghan's questioning of aspects of the teaching profession

became the New Right 'discourse of derision' (Ball 1990a). Callaghan's commitment to a policy of parents controlling education became educational consumerism. The general direction remained the same; a move to central control of what was taught (Phillips 2001 pp. 12 - 27).

From where I stood as a Head, it seemed to me that the incoming Conservative administration had a market orientated agenda. Sir Keith Joseph was the Secretary of State for Education and Stuart Sexton his special advisor. In 1983 the White Paper *'Teaching Quality'* implicitly linked appraisal to pay, as did the 1985 White Paper *'Better Schools'*. Paragraph 181 of the latter described appraisal as the key instrument for managing the relationship between pay, responsibilities and performance. This position was abandoned when industrial action started and schools began to send children home. By November 1985 Sir Keith Joseph made it clear that appraisal and pay were not linked, or at least not in the middle of a widespread dispute. Callaghan's desire to gain improvements to education for economic reasons had veered very close to 'payment by results' under Sir Keith Joseph. However, the moves were halted by teachers joining together to oppose these changes. The lesson was that professionals needed to have a collective response.

The following years saw several fits and starts concerning appraisal largely as there were many other reforms in education culminating in the Education Reform Act of 1988. The 1986 Education Act had contained a clause to enable appraisal but it did not enforce it by changes to Conditions of Service. As a result it was ineffective. In 1990 two different Secretaries of State for Education gave conflicting views on the status of appraisal. First, John McGregor announced in September that appraisal would not be mandatory. In December Kenneth Clarke stated that it would be mandatory. That

uncertainty in the Government official disclosure on appraisal status was interesting. The Central Government does not employ teachers - LEAs do, but here the Central administration was attempting to control teacher behaviour. There was frequent wavering over whether appraisal was to improve performance through professional development or improve performance by directing their work.

The National Appraisal Scheme made mandatory by Kenneth Clarke was the Education (School Teacher Appraisal) Regulations 1991, often referred to as circular 12/91. During the revision to this dissertation I have spent time looking back at this scheme and feel, with the benefit of hindsight, that it had much to recommend it. It was based on a two-year appraisal cycle with a focus related to the School Development Plan. This appraisal scheme included a full range of professional duties, classroom observation, an interview and a follow up meeting after the appraisal statement had been issued. It was developmental and had no link to pay or disciplinary matters. This has characteristics in common with the system currently used in Scotland to assess Chartered Teacher Status that some researchers have identified as an alternative to Threshold Assessment (Menter et al 2004). From my perspective it appears to be less judgemental and regulatory than Threshold. I was a serving Head at the time it was introduced and recall the scheme as a potentially useful tool, so why did it fail to become embedded in schools?

Having reviewed my old records and talked to colleagues about the 12/91 scheme the consensus that the process was sound but fell victim to other pressures. First there was the issue of trust. Around the time the appraisal scheme was introduced the first OFSTED inspections (trial inspections) were taking place. Teachers were resentful of what might be viewed as part of managerial control. In my school there were several

department heads who objected to non-specialists assessing their work. In particular, the Head of Art refused to be assessed unless it was by a trained art specialist. This was a nonsense but created turmoil and tension. Bartlett (1998) views mistrust as the main obstacle to the success of the 12/91 scheme. Basic mistrust led to lack of commitment at both school and LEA levels. Secondly, there were financial restraints. Those who had training needs identified did not have them met unless they were aligned to the School Development Plan. My LEA did not fund any outcomes from this appraisal scheme and school budgets were over stretched so individual needs were not met. Thirdly, as it was a two-year cycle staff who moved had to start all over again. In the official DfES report (Barber et al 1995) the view was that too many innovations were being introduced at the same time so that implementation commitment was low. That reflects my experience. My recollection is that funding, a cumbersome process designed by the LEA, local opposition from the NASUWT and work overload led to what I now view as a good scheme just fading away after the first cycle. The scheme had merit, the timing of its introduction was unfortunate and the result was a lack of rigour and poor evaluation at school and LEA level of the process. The scheme did not fail, it just came to a halt. Threshold might not have been required had 12/91 been successful.

It seemed to me that there was a feeling that education was letting down 'UK Plc' and that had to change. This would sit well with the introduction of OFSTED in the 1990s. Even before that regulatory body started operation, the Conservatives secured a breakthrough by introducing an element of performance pay into Headteachers' Conditions of Service. What had been on the edge of being openly proclaimed for over a decade became a reality for Heads. An element of Performance Pay had been agreed and confirmed in Conditions of Service.

The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) had been set up in 1992 to advise on teachers' pay. At its formation the Government gave it the remit of deciding how pay for school teachers might be 'more closely linked to their performance' (STRB 1992 para 6.1). This was repeated annually by the Conservatives until the election of 1997 when Labour came to power. The STRB did not act in relation to all teachers but, with the introduction of Headteacher appraisal in 1992, it introduced an annual review of Headteacher performance with a link to salary. By 1994 this had been formalised into a link to prescribed formal performance measures, one of which would be pupil progress. Many Heads saw their salaries rise because they produced data to show progress. Performance Related Pay in this form was unthreatening because Heads were benefiting. Any concerns that were voiced (Smith 1992, Rowley 1991) were simply ignored or discounted. OFSTED reports were still few in number and other external data was not available. The Head justified the claim as a recognition of their new efforts. Downes (1994) warned about trouble ahead but most Heads could not see it. I did not recognise any danger in the agreement. Many Heads who had gained from this form of Performance Related Pay saw no reason why classroom teachers should not also benefit. Resistance to Performance Related Pay was fading. However, as Ball (1990b pp. 317 - 336) points out, an essential part of the modernising agenda is separating the managers from the managed. Experience outside education (Kessler 1994) indicates that the contrasting approaches contained in Performance Related Pay favour the use of managerial power over professional autonomy, and managers over the managed. We perhaps were not sensitive enough to the scent of change. I saw only the immediate gain and wanted it for all staff. We were lulled like deer seeing juicy vegetation beyond cover. Heads had accepted the changes and so had broken that unity. The lessons of 1985 had been forgotten.

School experience of Performance Pay was limited. There was experience in Higher Education. Higher Education is not compulsory and the style of teaching required is different. But, it is teaching. Universities had experience of new external inspection assessment arrangements and performance reports. It had little impact on the knowledge of schools with regard to Performance Management. It has been pointed out (Lewis 1993a, 1993b) that in the Higher Education sector words such as 'quality' and 'flexibility' stated at one level of employee were interpreted at employer levels as 'productivity' and 'savings'. The trick in using these contradictory terms hinged on the suggestion that everyone benefited. However, it would not be until much later that the real beneficiaries emerge. By then, the system of Performance Pay was in place.

Several surprises came to me as I 'sniffed the air'. I have already described how far back in the time the support for Performance Related Pay went in Government circles. A second surprise was how advice was ignored. Helen Marliss (1992), who worked for Hay Management Consultants, produced a reasoned, balanced and sequential outline of how performance related pay could be introduced into education. She argued that it was not a quick fix or a substitute for the deficiencies of seriously uncompetitive basic salaries. Her advice was that no wholesale transfer of industrial models would work. Instead, she argued that any system that was introduced should reflect the service culture of schools. Her argument was that the successful introduction of performance pay might take years but it would generate a level of integration that worked and supported a strategy of improvement for schools. For Marliss, 'soft' issues about people management and teamwork were as important as the bottom line quantitative targets. The Hay organisation was later to provide much of the preparation work for Threshold. They seemed to ignore the work of Marliss. It is possible that consultants commissioned to provide advice could identify the answer the customer (in this case the Government)

required and in turn modify previous thoughts on the issue. Until the documentation on the process is finally released we will not know how far the DfEE modified or accepted the recommendations of the Hay consultancy.

At the outset I found it difficult to understand the preoccupation of successive Governments with performance management and performance related pay for teachers. At the core of performance related pay is a belief that the answer to greater efficiency and productivity lies in managing by regulating the performance of people. It seems on a par with the 'short sharp shock' myth about crime. This is a belief that the solution to a complex problem lies in one simple answer; improving school performance. That leads to a need to control teachers. One solution might be to create competition amongst teachers and alter the overall structure of the profession by having different levels of worker. The myth that economic strength can result from improving teaching has been around for over a century and in recent times has become something of a mantra. How did the Threshold fit into this belief system? It fitted in because it could make schools more efficient and competitive. The autonomy of teachers over their work had to be diminished.

Teachers in England are not employed by the Central Government. Most teachers are employed by LEAs. However, there is a national pay structure so the contradiction of the Government making decisions about the pay of staff it does not employ is not as clear as it seems. Given that a key document used in the Threshold Process is the PANDA (Performance and Assessment Data) produced by OFSTED which is an agency of Central Government there appears a strong centralist influence on education. Both Phillips and Furlong (2001) and Richardson (1999) argue that a centralist strategy is suggested by Performance Pay and Threshold Process. Ball (1999) looks at it

differently. He suggests that whilst Performance Related Pay gives more tangible rewards to some, the matter is a result of fragmentation and competition where praise and blame are the tactics driving the strategy. The skill of Government is to use the fragmentation for its own needs. Threshold is financed from the centre, controlled from the centre and delivered locally to a centrally specified instructional programme.

The Labour Government of 1997 promised change, reform and improvement of State services including education. The talk was of 'modernising' and 'target setting' to measure improvement. 'Modernising' seemed new and innovative but I sensed that it had much to do with control. To the STRB, Labour proposed a review of 'what measures might be taken to ensure that pay systems are used to relate pay more closely to individual performance' (STRB, 1998 Appendix A). This does not look very different to the Conservative submission to the STRB in 1992. Cutler and Waine (1999 and 2000) have written about the contradictions of Threshold. Individual benefits are capable of being interpreted as attempted coercion by tying the rewards to particular outcomes. There is a stress on relational aspects (such as Continuing Professional Development etc) but it is equally possible to see those as transactional because performance and pay are linked. Meet the targets to be paid more. The profession is encouraged to take responsibility for itself, yet the Head's decision is subject to external validation. That effectively means monitoring the judgements of insiders to ensure they conform to the guidelines issued from the centre. It is at odds with self-controlled professional development. Cutler and Waine suggest that Threshold indicates significant changes of behaviour by the central Government. The scheme was not negotiated with the unions, and teachers were not consulted on timing. Talk of a human relations strategy promoting teacher and organisational objectives is undercut by the detail of the timetable and guidelines. They (Cutler and Waine) identify the radical

component as the possibility that each teacher could have different rates of pay. To them 'Fast Track', 'Upper Spine', and 'Advanced Skills teachers' means personal contracts. A Labour Government has undermined national pay scales and agreements forcing Heads and other senior staff to become the change agents on the new Conditions of Service. Normally, in excess of 80% of school budgets are allocated to staff costs. Heads will have to manage Performance Related Pay rewards after special grants are withdrawn. Merson (2000) uses the term 'competitive individualism' and outlines a scenario where Threshold contains little that is 'modern' (new). He believes that the description of teachers as reluctant to change from an old Fordist model is overstated and that what is being offered is the implementation of new technology together with management styles to regulate/monitor workers more closely. The control continues but is described as individual rewards. The goal is the same, to become more economically competitive.

The theme of enhanced surveillance and control to ensure compliance is supported by Broadbent and Laughlin (1997). New Public Management, they argue, is deployed to strengthen internal control because there is a distrust of the discretionary power of professionals. Invoking individualism has weakened the clan mentality of norms in the teaching body. Fortunately, teachers seem quite adept at negotiating their way through such actions. Research (Adnett and Davies, 1999) has shown that the market supporters' argument that 'competition' increases teacher 'effort' does not seem to follow. Rather there is more competition for able students. The market can be distorted like any other market. In time the Threshold may be distorted but for now the situation does not look promising.

Adnett (1999) believes that Threshold and Performance Management will create dysfunctional behaviour in teachers. He sees the danger of weakening or even destroying compliance with a prevailing implicit code of conduct. The collegiate ethos, helping each other and supporting through problems are at risk. Adnett claims that in a multi-tasked occupation like teaching concerned with the wider social development of pupils in addition to the outcomes of examination results, such changes will alter behaviour to concentrate on achieving targets. A Government need to influence productivity with a new pay structure will result in teachers losing discretion. Adnett feels that it is the non-economic realities that form the intrinsic motivation and social relations of the profession. Peer esteem and a service ideal may not survive new pay arrangements, nor might ethical behaviour. If professional reputation and standing is currently collateral, but that changes to individual collateral then, Adnett thinks there may be an attempt to hit targets by non-ethical means. I found that a powerful argument. Over recent years there have been reported incidents when Key Stage results have been altered by Heads. When found out, they have defended themselves by saying that it was the pressure of expectations that caused them to behave unprofessionally. I do not condone such behaviour, but I understand it. In a small school faced with falling numbers, the temptation to help students to perform better in Key Stage tests must be enormous. Will such temptations increase when individual rewards depend on successful achievement of targets? The existing implicit code of behaviour is a professional asset which might fall victim to changing personal (individualistic) morality.

To complete his argument, Adnett cites the introduction of the 1265 hours requirement into teacher contracts. This was seen at Government level as creating a 'right to manage' mechanism for Heads. The reality is that many schools no longer have

voluntary activities like drama productions and school visits. The intention is to establish a legal right for Heads to insist on more teacher-time in school. The outcome has been to alienate many teachers who do just what is described in their contract and no more. The Threshold application contains a requirement to support 'the aspirations of the school'. I believe that this approach will damage shared professional ethics and morality. 'What is in it for me?' might well be a substitute philosophy. The inclusion of 1265 hours into Conditions of Service has encouraged some to count time. Self-image is important. Mahony and Hextall (2000) commented in early research work on Threshold that the process was seen by many respondents as a negative influence on school cultures. Treat teachers like factory hands with production targets and 'hours' (that is, with codified time such as directed time for meetings) and they will behave in a non-professional way. The codified time has led to some teachers to define their behaviour in line with those codes. In reality, those that need to be directed are often less committed, they are the ones who leave meetings at the designated time, no matter what is being discussed.

Anne Storey (2000) has reviewed the documents held by the Department for Education and Employment during the design and production of Threshold. She also held discussions with officials within the department. The phrases she noted such as a 'world class education system', 'a return on investment' and 'the economy and society of the future' all point towards a particular view of what is needed from Threshold and Performance Management. The respondents to the consultation process differed from this view as they worried about financial quotas and damaged relations between the managers and the managed. The consultation appeared to ignore those responses. Her work on the documents shows that the Department for Education and Employment believes that teachers will be motivated by Performance Management/Pay and that

managers will deploy and develop teaching staff more efficiently. Storey rejects this as failing to understand the culture of teaching. The appraisal is not real in her opinion, it is about objective scorings. Development is claimed by the officials but the figures are really measurements of accountability. It will only work if there is acquiescence. And even if there is the acquiescence, the main question is still fudged. Whose performance are we looking at? The individual sharing a split group, the team of teachers within a department, the Head, the Governors, the parents or the pupils? Storey claims that a leap of faith will be required for the new system to produce a net benefit. Describing it as a miracle might be more accurate.

What Storey calls faith is based on a belief system and a curious national split has been observed in policies affecting teachers' work. Menter et al (2004) report that whilst England has Performance Threshold Assessment orientated towards performativity and teacher assessment, Scotland has Chartered Teacher Status. Chartered Teacher Status is strongly focused towards professional development. It would seem that in Scotland teachers a few years into their careers are the recipients of greater public confidence and trust. In England there is a continuing mistrust of teachers leading to a desire for greater regulation and control. The two contrasting responses to managing teachers' work and motivation are taking place in close geographical proximity but they indicate significant differences in how the commitment of teachers is viewed. Two belief systems operate within a few miles of each other. In England there is a need to regulate, audit and standardise, but in Scotland there is trust and development.

During the probing of this shard I found a paper produced by Industry in Education (Tremaine and Whitcutt 2000) directed at teachers. It offered suggestions for Performance Management in schools based upon industrial experience. In many ways it

encompassed the confusions about Threshold and Performance Management. There was an assumption that because Performance Management/Pay is common in industry (69% of organisations in 1997) it must be good. The paper also stated the view that it led to fair rewards for those who do the best. 'Best' is a value judgement open to interpretation. How that philosophy sits with what some describe as 'fat cat' pay I do not understand. My own view is that performance pay in industry is about power. On a positive note the Industry in Education paper thought that external influences beyond school control should be discounted and that the system would need sufficient funding. The authors were probably well intentioned, however, it is yet another indication that the outsiders regard education as just another business. Schools do not choose what they are prepared to supply, the raw material, or what they will engage in. It is not a simple business. As Thrupp (1999) has shown, the social class characteristic and locations of pupils profoundly affect the daily life and management of schools.

In being seen to do 'something' regulation has grown. Clarke and Newman (1997) have questioned whether regulatory methods are an attempt to overcome the inability to maintain an expensive 'social settlement'. If they are, then they are not effective. Power (1997) makes similar points. In being seen to be doing something, an industry of comfort production has grown. Audit and regulations reassure us because they demand accountability even when that accountability is facile. Interestingly, that accountability is limited to those over whom the audit/regulator holds power. As Robertson (2000) puts it, 'individualism is doing well'. Education is moving from a service ethic to entrepreneurial opportunism. Produce 100% five A*/C GCSEs or equivalents and an educational knighthood could be yours. The service ethic has been replaced by the self, an ethic of 'just for me'. That 'just for me' may indicate other influences. Mahony et al (2004a) indicate that what I call 'just for me' might reflect the masculinising of the

teaching profession in England. Rather than modernising teachers' work the reforms are instead encouraging masculine behaviours where individualist, competitive and performative models of promotion and career progression privileges some at the cost of the collective and is particularly hostile to women. I will return to this theme later.

As I started to write up my work, other researchers were beginning to report on Threshold Assessment. I saw that many of my concerns were themes that other researchers were identifying. The potential negative influence of Threshold on school culture was remarked upon by Mahony and Hextall (2000). Elsewhere, research was indicating a high level of private contractor involvement in the process (Mahony et al 2004b, 2002, Wragg et al 2004) that placed outside influences into the heart of school life. Threshold was altering the work of teachers in many ways as my later comments indicate.

Sniffing the air can be troubling. When an animal senses danger it may have little choice about what comes next. Deer run before a fire, cats get chased by dogs. My senses tell me that there is much wrong with the Threshold process. I worry about my realisation that some kind of performance management and intention to have related pay structures has been around for thirty years. The new model of modernisation looks too much like old coercion. Focusing on the individual may bring people into teaching who are ambitious for themselves in place of those who are ambitious for their students/colleagues. I admit to some blindness in this because I have grown up in a service ethic where doing good is valued by teachers. Perhaps that is the real problem for this new approach, there are too many old teachers. However, with few new teachers available, existing staff will have to adapt to new ways.

In taking stock of the atmosphere I have described the policy and political environment that existed as the Threshold Process got underway. This was the background I recognised as the one in which my research would take place. This was what I sniffed in the air. My task now was to design a methodology that placed this new awareness into a research project. The methodology had to assist me to pursue an understanding of what Threshold meant and how it might be acted upon in schools. The air did not smell right but I still have to act upon the instructions the Government had given me. Like the deer I had to leave the safety of cover.

Shard 3

A Methodology for Researching the Threshold Process

So far I have been telling the story about policy and political positionings. The next step was to develop a set of questions and an approach that would enable me to critically explore the issues. In particular, I needed to manage the challenge of my position as researcher whilst working with my colleague Heads to in order to tell a story of Threshold that went beyond my own story.

My work is flexible, iterative and constantly changing. Researching within this work environment has all the confusions of the Social Sciences, particularly when the research is concerned with the implications of externally set policy upon my work. These are the messy realities of working in a peopled community where actors do not always conform to prescribed roles or construct reality in the way expected by those who create policy, let alone those who implement it within the community context. Some days I am the man on the white horse leading my team onwards in an enlightened and transformational fashion when discussing teaching and learning. On other days I am a fearsome ‘Kapo’, the fellow prisoner inflicting further oppression upon the already oppressed when insisting on compliance with National Curriculum needs. Yet both personas are me, even if they are sometimes concealed from others. They are the ‘light and dark’ of me that I hold on a bedrock of beliefs and values. The interpretation differs in action according to the circumstances but the basic ‘me’ remains the same. This has implications for my research methodology, the ‘Science’ and philosophy that underpins this project. I wanted my methodology to reflect how I act in and understand the society I inhabit. Through that position I further interpret the two most important sets of assumptions on which methodologies are based. Ontological assumptions refer to how

we see the world while the epistemological assumptions are concerned with how we know or accept the social world and judge that knowledge to be accurate. Methodology is concerned with 'how' we research rather than 'what' we research. It is a starting point for understanding, albeit a 'crumbly cake' (Salmon 1992) that lacks the clear structures described in research guides where a novice researcher is often beguiled by the notion that a methodology can be selected as a 'one size fits all' package of methods and methodology. That is not the case. Textbooks are useful to reassure but even though I am an inexperienced researcher it was clear to me that the methodology had to be workable in the society where the research was located.

If methodology is seen as the 'whole', the architecture of the research, then the methods are the building blocks. The typography of method is concerned with investigation, technique, appropriateness, feasibility and effectiveness. This research is situated in a society, a society that is undergoing reform by the implementation of policy. My assumption about that society and points of reference to navigate that society predate the reforms but are placed in a cultured setting and dependent upon the utilisation of cultural resources. My choice of methodology is conditioned by that setting. Rejection of simple methodologies as unsuitable is possible but the adoption of complex methodologies have their own problems. Critical Theory would suggest that solutions to problems are themselves problematic or may become problematic (Dale and Robertson 2001) so that theories generate frameworks for action and eschew set piece answers. That is the world I recognise. The paradigm for the research has to accommodate the complexity of the society being scrutinised. It has to link the local situation to the wider national process.

The Education Reform Act of 1998 (ERA) has led to a constant stream of changes in the work of Headteachers. I learn by managing that change using several learning styles (Kolb 1984) and by 'keeping on target while hanging loose' (Rubin and Rubin 1994). This description describes my work in meeting the challenges of accountability (league tables and OFSTED etc) whilst managing school life. Whatever is going on 'out there' I have to mediate, interpret and then 'fit' to the relevant requirements. My actions are defined by the social world I inhabit. In researching the Threshold Process I need to acknowledge several social issues. First there are six different schools in my study to ensure that the research picture is wider than just my experience. Aside from myself, the five other Heads represent five differing political situations, management issues and struggles within the nuances of their institutions. I need to get below the surface to see what is happening, to explore what the Threshold Process has meant to a community of schools seen through the eyes of the Heads. There is an ethical dimension to this work. Any methodology must be sensitive to the self-image/public image of these schools. After the research is over I will still work with these schools. Unlike OFSTED I am not 'in and out' within a week. I will be working with 'partners' to understand how this policy (Threshold) was interpreted, mediated and applied in situ.

Having made a case for rejecting an approach that ignored context it is not surprising that I consider a model of education research based upon the natural sciences as unsuitable for my work. The debate over positive and post-positive research has moved on. Rich data can be discovered in a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods providing that reflexive critical analysis, that is scrutiny and reflection, is applied. The key factors from my perspective is that the methodology is flexible enough to accept and work with uncertainty. What is happening in education is complex and while I seek 'wisdom in the face of uncertainty' (Kitchner and Brenner

1990), I realise that seeking and achieving are themselves indicative of my desire to have greater certainty in the turbulence of my working life. Traditional research based on the positivist paradigm falls short of illuminating the dynamic character of schools. The assumption in the positivist model of certainty upon a conceptual framework of objectivity is questionable even within the scientific community most associated with the paradigm.

James Watson (Nobel Prize Winner 1968 for his work on DNA) is cited (Latour and Woolger 1979) as talking about 'luck' and the social constructions that led to the breakthrough in DNA. Watson indicates that the simplistic, linear casual, mechanical and hierarchical research process associated with positivist research needed serendipity to be successful.

We have all lived through a time of great change. While this is not to suggest we all see the world of education the same, or indeed make the same decisions, we do at times share a common experience of events. Teachers of my age have a memory of how IQ testing was discredited. Birt, the researcher developing the concepts, had 'helped' the scientific data to prove his work. Until that was uncovered, teachers were taught that IQ was an important measure of potential because it was scientific and, therefore, irrefutable. How ironic that 'value added' is a new mantra in the age of targets and managerialism when it all builds on measurement. When Birt found that the data did not match his theory he 'massaged' the data. Some in my staffroom would say that the Government is doing much the same now.

Anderson et al (1986) show the disunity of science and how attempts, such as Popper's 'falsification', or Kuhn's 'normal and revolutionary science' to explain objectivity,

merely add to uncertainty and highlights that a natural science research model does not exist as a total explanation but rather is a series of interpretations. Objectivity cannot be separated from context since what we believe is often what we have created, there is not a condition called objectivity floating free from the environment (Eisner 1992). Scientific changes and the belief in scientific knowledge are transactional. Objectivity can be created by applying a critical spirit to enquiry, using reason and balancing argument at all times (Phillips 1989). That position tacitly accepts that uncertainty and the absence of universal laws/truths are the world that I, as a social researcher, am investigating. Better to acknowledge that situation rather than assert pure objectivity .

However, this is not a simple question of quantitative versus qualitative. What Kidder and Fine (1987) have called 'number crunching' has some use in research. With my five colleague Heads I began one session by asking how many staff had applied to cross the Threshold. That simple question acted like a 'door' being pushed open to further discussion. Who had applied? How many as a percentage of the eligible? and why did these 'samples' vary between the six communities provided insights into the application of a policy that had been the subject of national training and checking from external assessors within the context of that particular community? It was my intention to find a balance between my own experience and that of my five colleagues as I went about this project. If a natural science paradigm prevailed, then there should be consistency based on exposure to uniform training and consistent application of criteria. I had doubts that qualitative data alone would do. It tells a researcher little about the schools and circumstances of events. A powerful personal example was the experience of my father dying. My presence at his death was at once the most dreadful and wonderful experiences of my life. To state that he died is a fact but it is woefully inadequate to describe what happened. Even now, for years later, I become very emotional about the

event. That day 'of loss' shaped my life. For me, the move to the Threshold and subsequent performance management was experienced like a 'loss'. The 'loss' of past certainties, of relationships as I become the 'enforcer' and a 'loss' of autonomy as I am monitored and complete the paperwork. That is why quantitative material is not sufficient on its own to explain what this process has meant in schools. This solution to the perceived problem of teacher 'quality' is, in itself creating problems. 'Loss' is tough to deal with and yet the Threshold process drives 'loss' into the schooling system as we move into a 'passed', 'failed' and 'abstained' teaching force. The collegial loss removes accepted and ingrained understandings amongst teachers. Who are you if the platform upon which your self-image has been based has gone?

Questioning the positivist paradigm is not new. The historical hermeneutic paradigm, (Gadamer 1977, Habermas 1971,1974) followed by later critical hermeneutics (Bleicher 1980), emphasised context. It realised that subjectivity is brought to cases or understandings in a practical and humanistic fashion. We cannot ignore our heritage, traditions, history and language for they shape our philosophical characters. The paradigm is concerned with transforming; it highlights the significance of change and our responses to change. It makes no claim to be objective. The theme is echoed elsewhere (Carr 1995). Values should be examined and articulated as part of reality. Carr states that if we accept the importance of context, then the philosophy and values we hold cannot be ignored when researching. If we do, then we are no better than laboratory assistants without a claim to know that we are doing. This is why critical research is important; this is why my methodology is critical. I want to hear what is said by my 'partners' and the background noises of the environment that informs my view. It is critical because it asks questions about interests, institutions and power.

Critical educational research accepts complexity, the heterarchic nature of information, the holographic form of relationships and the intermediate sources of change. It is research that is mutually causal with indeterminate sources of change. It aims to alter what is, not merely describe it. Reason (1988) has used the notion of the researcher 'contaminating' the research to foster dialectical discourse (reflexiveness). Other researchers claim transformational emancipatory benefits for that approach. Lomax (1994) and Whitehead (1993) attacked the positivist paradigm using the term 'Action Research' which, at the time, was regarded as radical. However, the 'shock of the new' passes and the pleas of Newby (1997) and Walsh (1996) for a pluralist approach as an alternative to separate positivist and post-positivist research now appear dated as there is a wider acceptance of combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The conceptual view of an unstable and changing context has implications for methods as well as methodology. A substantive description of the methods used in the dissertation comes later, but the seepage between the philosophical/scientific standpoint and the techniques for research is not unimportant. I have five colleagues to consider. They need to understand that in sharing my research, the techniques will reflect a joint interpretation of the society our daily work is located in. Research is not a regular activity for me or my colleagues, our account comes from our status as 'insiders'. The shared research is a collaborative process, emerging not with a 'universal truth' but rather a recognisable account of the Threshold process. That is why a constructive critical approach is useable for my research. I have sifted and synthesised the 'voices' moving from voice to voices and back again.

The researcher as 'one of us' is significant. Research from 'inside' rather than from 'outside' can illuminate and alter practice. 'Outside' research whilst apparently

‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ can be judgmental; further as it is perceived to be external it often has low value. ‘Life as Research/Research as Life’ (Ely et al 1991) is about the immersion of the researcher into the community being researched. Some idea of how powerful this is can be gleaned in the success of reflective practice (Schon 1987) as a concept. This has captured the imagination of many teachers who see the transformational process as empowering their work. Organisations have followed this by developing their own versions of action research and reflective practice. I have experience of such responses. The Industrial Society issues a small card illustrating ‘Action-Centred Leadership’ that is the skeletal framework of the reflective practitioner. The reflective cycle is acceptable to the co-researchers because they are familiar, that is comfortable, with it. That ‘comfort’ needs regarding with caution. By now I was clear that a broadly qualitative approach would enable me to work with the other Heads and create a narrative about the Threshold experience. The techniques used will be described later but by now the philosophical approach was clear in my mind.

Researching across the surface of a phenomena tells us little about that ‘society’. We become a ‘visiting Aunt’ for whom the clutter has been tidied away but it is family life that reveals us for what we are, not the special arrangements for the visiting ‘Aunt’ or researcher. There has to be a pragmatically useable methodology but it cannot be ‘cosy’.

There are also other questions to be addressed about the lack of critical analysis in educational institutions. Carr and Kemmis (1986) state that a distinctive feature of the beliefs and values in which everyday education judgements are made is that their truth is regarded as self-evident and therefore adopted or accepted in a non-critical, non-reflective way. Critical analysis means questioning; a practical researcher working

inside the researched community cannot always be comfortable doing the project. I have heard 'gossip' whilst researching. At that point I have had to renegotiate with the individual my record of an interview if I wanted to use the gossip. Collaboration does not mean giving power away (Torbet 1991). However, it does require a clear view of ethics and the need for research rigour (McNiff 1995). Research can have outcomes that persuade and inspire (Henwood and Pidgeon 1993) and beyond this project I would want to develop my work to add to the body of knowledge about shifts in governance and the new public service. It cannot be done with this dissertation but it has inspired me to go on further.

The group I am working with are all male Heads. In this project we need to keep reminding ourselves that this is the 'view from here'. Winter (1989) indicates that teachers face five concentric rings of 'understanding' in their working life:-

1. individual perceptions of their careers.
2. the immediate institutional structure within which they work.
3. the general structure of the system of educational institutions.
4. the relationship of educational institutions to economic and political institutions.
5. Government and opposition party policies towards education.

In responding to these concentric understandings, we draw on our experience. To be a 'real teacher', is subscribing to the values held in the society a requirement? I am always surprised that few young teachers question the notion of 'a golden age' relayed to them by the staffroom 'old guard' when all children were perfect. That notion existed over thirty years ago when I first worked in schools. The golden age always

seems to be about a decade back from the present so it is a moveable concept that is indicative of how teachers articulate challenges in relation to their work. Acceptance of the myth is, in part, the membership price of the staffroom. With this, the myth continues. By default 'modern' children are difficult compared to those in the past. Epistemologically the accuracy of our social world may well depend on the 'rocks' that provide social anchors. Heads of Departments are now called Managers and responsibility payments have become managerial grades in the Conditions of Service document. In schools the impact of these changes has been minimal however they have created conflicts for post holders. They do not think they are managers so have to respond differently to the culture of the work place or contextualise the title to fit the perception. The change has created further difficulties not alleviated them. This is why a methodology that recognises the centrality of power is needed. We need to speak more than one 'language'; I speak 'managerial' and 'teacher' fluently.

My beliefs about schools and teaching are founded on over 30 years of being an insider. My use of a critical methodology is that I feel it will enable me to make sense of the confusing world that I and my fellow heads inhabit. This research is about how six different Heads and their school communities dealt with a significant upheaval in the way that teachers' work is assessed and rewarded. This required a critical methodology. It is based upon a cycle of reflection and constructive dialogue that engages the policy in situ rather than the politics of supporters and opponents of the reforms that have led to the Threshold process. Case studies have 'naturalistic generalisation' (Stake and Trumble 1997) and for this research the case study format fits the methodology of linking separate communities together in order to generate a more complex and thicker description of the experience. A methodology that supports dialectic development has a

role in explaining the social world we inhabit. A critical methodology supports dialogue, reflection and synthesis.

Having laid out my broad approach to the research, the next step is to the practicalities.

Shard 4

Trials, Tribulations and Techniques

This shard deals with the research process; of how the questions I began with generate a broad research methodology and in turn become research practice. It is a process that can be described in terms of its trials, tribulations and techniques. It also has moments of triumph.

Uncertainty is a euphemism I use in adulthood to describe my fear. Fear is a description too direct and raw to be used after two decades of holding senior positions in public service. I have learned to be circumspect and cautious about showing my true feelings. Fear is what I felt in 1959 when, with my brother, I walked out across a deep and unforgiving pond, frozen by a harsh winter. We felt compelled to venture out on the ice even though we recognised that it was dangerous, stupid and unnecessary. There were no witnesses to our courage or folly, and when we had completed our adventure we appeared unchanged; but, we were changed. Once committed, there was no going back as the ice began to crack and move behind us, only our adrenalin boosting an ever quicker pace across to, the safety of the far side. It has remained our secret for over 40 years. It took us out of safety. We survived it and shared the elation and joy of survival as a defining experience. It created a bond between us built upon the adversity of ice loudly cracking as if to underline our perilous position.

Echoes of that adventure are to be found in the uncertainty I have experienced whilst researching the Threshold Process. The process of gathering the data, exploring how to move from methodology to practical technique has been emotionally draining. Applied qualitative research recognises the importance of emotions (Jacob 1987, Bogdan and

Bilken 1982, Wolcott 1992). Other work questions whether, even in claims for quantitative rationality, it is not emotions that drive actions (Lane 1991). None of this prepared me for the difficulties I faced in moving from my philosophical methodology stance to research. Just as the cracking ice signalled a threat to my well being, this experience has made me question my work as a Headteacher. It has created great uncertainty. The uncertainty may be about the changes my profession is facing; whatever the reasons, they are real. There are also questions about relationships amongst my colleague Heads and my own teachers; that are raised but not addressed in this dissertation. They are for me to resolve overtime.

To research is to be actively working and the description of the techniques employed is how the broadly qualitative critical approach I identified as my methodology became practical research. I began by trials. This was the process by which I identified what would/would not work when tried in the field. The description of the trialling will not be extensive since I consider these to be steps, on the way to identification of the methods which became the substantive part of the practical work. Tribulations (difficulty/suffering) are explained because they had to be faced before emerging with the techniques (investigation, appropriateness, feasibility and effectiveness). The dynamic is about reaching the safety of the other side after the danger of the cracking ice. The metaphor is about taking risks by trying to test whether the ice was strong enough to bear the weight of the exploration.

Trials

The touchstone of my research is to ask ‘what I am trying to do and why?’ The answer is to tell the story of how a nationally-imposed set of policies to alter the working conditions and life of teachers was experienced by a small group of headteachers charged with the responsibility of implementing the policy at institutional level. It is my story, but it may also be the similar story of others in schools throughout England and Wales. For my Headship, it will be unique for that context but it is also perhaps a recognisable experience for other Heads. The story demonstrates how the perceived problems and the solutions are problematic. To follow a critical methodology is to examine the complex and contradictory relationships that are present in The Threshold Process. I needed to examine the social locations of the participants if credible and plausible constructions were to be found. Right at the start of exploring methods I stumbled when I considered a method that listened little and judged a lot.

The persuasive power of quantitative research is not be underestimated. Schools are bombarded with data. Each summer I am deluged with data about the outcomes of the examinations. I receive exam board data, LEA data; the Autumn Package from the DfEE; out-turn data from YELLIS; grading profiles from the LEA to compare similar schools and, most influential of all because it comes from OFSTED and, therefore, arrives with the implicit threat of inspection, the PANDA (Performance and Assessment Data). Heads spend a great deal of time dealing with lists that have the appearance of scientific validity. Teachers feel overwhelmed by OFSTED data influences (Woods and Jeffrey 1998). Newman and Clarke (1994) suggest that in articulating a managerialist discourse the public sector has accepted a market ideology in which the reforms are framed by words such as ‘efficiency’, ‘standards’, ‘monitoring’ and ‘judgement’. Despite my values I was tempted to measure because it seemed easy; a simple action for

a part-time researcher to manage. Measuring can be applied to almost any situation (Zeller 1997) and produces lists that 'nod' at validity. For a fleeting moment, I considered approaching all secondary schools in my LEA to gather data about the Threshold Process. It would have told me little about 'the experience'. The research would have replicated the DfEE and Cambridge Education Associates data at a local level. However, it would not have described the Threshold experience. It would merely have been a sub-set of data available elsewhere. Philosophically, such behaviour clashed with my methodology but, to my shame, the consideration of such a safe and uninvolved project perhaps indicates that the managerialist agenda of data, measuring and outcomes has more influence on me than I thought. I had to move out onto the ice.

The adoption of small group case study work, was a practical and feasible format for gaining knowledge about how the Threshold Process was being handled outside my own institution. What I decided to do was to experiment with a pilot group. A potential pilot group existed in an urban/city setting where I had been a Head earlier in my career. Blaxter et al (1996) describe piloting as 'reassessment without tears' (p 121); this was not my experience. The Heads concerned were approached and agreed to an informal pilot. Time pressures made me act quickly as I wanted to test methods before working with another group. The Threshold Training Programme was rolling out nationally and though I could 'bank/freeze' that experience; the process would lose the freshness of immediacy if Heads moved too far down the road of implementation without participating in the research. I wanted to research the experience, how I and they felt. Time is a precious commodity for any researcher (Northledge 1980) but for me, as a part-time researcher, it was a major problem. Acting hastily I found 'tears'.

A residual leaning towards lists encouraged me to produce a questionnaire in the format of a Likert scale. In rushing to act I had ignored context. No longer was I part of this group of Headteachers and my understanding of this environment was out of date. The questions I asked were wrong because I had forgotten that local reorganisation was more than likely due to falling rolls. My questions were regarded with suspicion, while I thought I had inside knowledge of what was happening in the city, I did not! Worse, for a researcher who espouses the transformational nature of research, in trying to assess reaction to the PANDA I asked these Heads some really insensitive intrusive questions. They thought I was trying to highlight PANDAs that were often poor in OFSTED terms. What I really wanted to discover was whether they felt the PANDA was a fair basis on which to assess the performance of teachers within the context of the school. My culpability lay in my haste and the poor framing of questions, in neglecting the context, and in an assumption that the pilot participants understood what the research was about. In the end, the outcome was to firmly secure in my mind that this research would only be flexible if these were mutual benefits which would embody the integrity and honesty that I believed was missing from the Threshold process. Jumping up and down on the thinnest part of the ice is not sensible. Probing and gaining knowledge is a useful way of deciding how to proceed.

Tribulations

I was raised a Methodist so the word tribulation always triggers an image of poor old Jonah. He had a dreadful time, though, like for many adolescents it was the plague of boils that struck me as his worst tribulation. The word conjured up an image of suffering. Having made a mess of the informal pilot trials I had to rethink my approach to the research. That required much reflection and soul searching. Like Jonah, I needed to pass through tribulation to be stronger on the other side.

The trial had made me certain that a close working relationship with my colleagues was vital if I was to research how the policy had been applied in schools. Failure in the pilot to convince the participants that I was trustworthy required me to rethink how I could work with another group. The group I wanted to work with was my local consortium; six Heads and schools in total, including my own. There was already a good working relationship between us arising partly from the nature of the area. We were a cluster of small towns serving a semi-rural hinterland, which in turn created quite a degree of homogeneity in our student and staff populations. There already existed a schedule of meetings between us to collaborate on local issues. This schedule provided us with an opportunity for group work. This research had to be fitted in around all my other work. The same work pressures applied to the other Heads. I took on the simple but important advice of Judith Bell (1987); that you can only decently ask others to give as much effort as you would be prepared to offer to other researchers. The process of negotiating access to my colleagues' experiences began.

The pilot experience had been sobering. I could not afford to let this group become disaffected. Entry to and initial contact with the individuals had to be successful if the research was to be carried out. Janesick (1994) emphasises that initial interaction is important. Trust has to be established at the beginning. The five other Heads are valued colleagues. I hoped that they would have co-operated anyway because of that relationship. This was not the situation where I needed to persuade someone to give me access in preference to others (Walford 1991). However, I wanted to value that willingness and in turn nurture it to enable us to work together on my research.

First, I met with each colleague in their school for a private discussion. I began by explaining the questions behind the research and how the project would describe the

Threshold experience. Outlining how much time I thought it would need, I sought their opinion of the reasonableness of my research aims. The return I offered was support during this new experience and an opportunity to participate in a research project that would produce a different sort of space for their 'voices'. I stressed their role as gatekeepers in their schools of the Threshold Process and that we could negotiate the boundaries together. I wanted all information out in the open in what has been called 'authentic communication' (McNiff et al 1996). Having answered any immediate responses/quotations I withdrew to give them several days to consider their response. This was time consuming since it had to be repeated five times; this process was spread from December 1999 to January 2000. In due course all agreed to participate and to give me access to their own experience, as Head, of the Threshold Process. I had their agreement to construct on one hand a narrative that for me was personal and on the other hand a narrative that was also ours, as a collective. This research was about me and us; me as an individual head and researcher and us as Heads and researched.

We then completed an agreement on ethics. We talked about making sure that we could secure anonymity and this was the basis for access. This we did in a group meeting. There was already a rapport amongst us but there was also a need in a joint meeting to be seen affirming trust. Quasi markets have led to competition, amongst schools and without an agreement that no market advantage would be sought from any information that emerged, the openness required to research might not have been present. That this had to be done highlights how far the changes over the past two decades had affected Heads as ethical subjects. The logic of performance indicators has extended into heart of the Headship. Six affirmations were given, and though that phrase makes it sound like swearing an oath of allegiance in some ceremony, the importance was the promise

to respect the differences between us and the different account that would be the experience of the Threshold Process in each school.

By negotiation we agreed that:-

- 1 . all institutions would be protected by anonymity (fictitious names).
2. all information would be provided in confidence.
3. the use of any information would be subject to informed consent.
4. no individual teachers would be identifiable.
5. that Heads will be given pseudonyms.
6. that while the responsibility for analysis and writing up the research findings remained my responsibility I would seek respondent validation from the colleagues who provided the information.
7. that if comments/conclusions were disputed we would work as a team to resolve them but accept that it may be appropriate to report disagreement.

These are normal ethical considerations (Sapsford and Abbot 1996, Bottery 1992) but the negotiation was abnormal in the sense that it required a close knit group of people to consider what these commitments meant. It underscored the serious nature of the research and our intention to add a participant perspective to information about the Threshold Process. The seriousness of the discussions led to a solemn atmosphere. Heads are often asked for data but here, for the first time in my 17 years of Headship, we effectively said “this is very important to us, we want our voices heard, we are determined to fully share our experience of this process and we are exposing our actions to colleagues knowing that the integrity and honesty this requires will be reciprocated”. It was a moving and promising start to our collective endeavours. The whole raft of market influences since ERA has encouraged schools to compete with each other, not least because finances are largely per capita driven. In that hot room at Clifftop School

we discovered a new sense of joint purpose. We agreed that we thought this important; so important that it would be a commitment we would respect over time, over personal differences, over external pressures and record what it was like to be part of the changing nature of teaching at the point of delivery.

This promising start was in contrast to the unhappy experience of the pilot. Bailey (1990) has suggested that collaboration is at odds with an age when individual success is so important. The Heads of the pilot group had felt under the spotlight of possible reorganisation and were suspicious of my intentions. Ethically, research must not harm individuals but their own need to survive/flourish in a hostile environment made them suspicious of my intentions. By contrast the consortium Heads regularly worked together on local matters. We had learnt to survive the changes. There was less chance of 'front stage'/back stage' behaviour (Goffman 1959) and the risk of compromise in my position as participant observer was reduced by the honesty of the relationships. After the thin ice of the pilot this was a more secure position. I moved on to techniques.

Techniques

Having tested the ice at the margins it was time to strike out from the safety of thinking and to launch our study. Appropriate techniques were required to move the research forward. Knowing what was not appropriate is only part of the process. Issues of feasibility and effectiveness have to be considered if the research was to be completed. In identifying techniques the support of my research group was an essential factor. What I wanted from them had to have value in their eyes while not becoming intrusive. Agreement on what was possible and useful had to be completed at the start of the project. Limited modification might be possible as the research unfolded, keeping all

participants equally involved by mutual agreement about the conduct of the research process would maintain the crucial integrity with everyone participating in full knowledge and respect of each other's situation. We needed to know where we were going and how the journey was to be made. The chosen platform technique for research was the Case Study. Yin (1993) describes 'case study' as the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context. I am not seeking universal truths about the Threshold Process. I am describing the experience of Threshold. I was exploring the phenomena of the Threshold through a case study of Heads with the opportunity to explore variations and relationships that shaped the actions of the group. That the sample group was accessible and convenient was helpful (Cohen et al 2000), but it did not diminish the requirement to construct a critical account of the experience. Documents, such as the Standards Fund claim for Threshold payments, list numbers. This research shows what happened to produce those numbers. The phrase 'instance in action' (Adelman et al 1980) explains the integral strengths of the case study format in the circumstances of policy implementation. By using the case study format, the intention was to enable the reader to understand how ideas, the abstract principles and actions fit together. The focus upon the lived experiences central to this study was intended to make the audience aware of the human dimension of policies and service provision at the point of delivery. This was a study of meaning making rather than explaining facts.

While the research embraced the case study as part of the broad methodology, this study used a number of research methods. These included personal observations, the collective observations of our responses, a collective remembering by reflexivity, and assessment of current and historical data, interviewing (singularly and in groups) and relevant documents. The mix of methods had an advantage in terms of time and

resources available (Cosley and Lury 1987). In telling their stories, the group restored the originals to accumulate collective learning (Connelly and Clandinin 1990). The six individuals were navigating within a framework of complex, normative references which were in turn related to this new situation of judging colleagues who, if graded successful, would be paid more than other teachers without the need for extra responsibility. Unified through the research project, the case study format enabled the six to share thoughts as we experienced the Threshold. This challenged the assumptions that individuals and their actions are located at the intersection of non-harmonised plural references and examined existential commitment (Baszanger and Dodier 1997). The six Heads' accounts can be understood within a series of contexts. The context of their own institution, the context of the geographical and institutional locality and the national context. We reported the experience of the group; we also worked together to check our own story against the stories unfolding in the other institutions. My research was a cycle of reflection and refinement. I was at the centre of the wheel, collecting data, coding it, sharing it back with the group and then modifying it as appropriate. The point of the analysis was to give as true a record of the Threshold experience as possible.

A characteristic often used to describe the context of Case Study research is 'bounded'. The description has been used to highlight that the phenomenon is taking place within a defined community with identifiable boundaries (Miles and Huberman 1994, Stake 1994). If the concept is widened to a position of 'in situ studies' then the boundaries should be clearly marked. For the purpose this research the boundaries were:-

- a) the six institutions
- b) the six Heads
- c) the Threshold Process as prescribed by Government Directive

- d) the time scale of the first phase of the process plus any subsequent appeals
- e) the schedule of meetings, reviews agreed to carry out the, research governed by ethical protocol about the research group
- f) the actions of the assessors external to the institutions who approve or otherwise the decisions of the Heads

As with any frontier each boundary had the potential to be the subject of 'leakage'. However, the strongest boundaries lay in time, place and people. Using Yin's (1993) typology this was a multiple case study that was both descriptive and explanatory. It contained Stake's (1995) four case study boundary characteristics. It was a case of 'something' (The Threshold Process Implementation). There is also an explicit attempt to preserve the wholeness/unity and integrity of the case by a more holistic focus and there are multiple sources of data, together with multiple data collection methods (interviews, observation, fieldwork and narrative). The naturalistic approach enabled me/us to capture what it was like as the process unfolded to which a critical methodology used reflexively identified themes and patterns across the expanse of the experience.

Helen Simons (1996 p. 228) has suggested that there are paradoxes in case study work that should be addressed in six ways:-

- reject a subjective/objective dichotomy and regard all participants equally
- recognise that a genuine creative encounter can contribute to new forms of understanding education
- regard different ways of seeing as new ways of knowing
- approximate the ways of the artist
- free the mind of traditional analysis

- embrace paradoxes with an over-riding interest in people.

This approach, along with a refusal to compromise on the 'openness' of qualitative work was attractive to me. In focusing on people and taking a broad representational approach I felt more can be seen than would be if I delved deeply using a more localised and detailed analysis. However, there were dangers in Simon's approach; specifically she fails to hear that the ice is cracking because of the pressures created by Government policy. Though her themes are philosophically attractive they fail to recognise that the official policy regime that the schools and heads found themselves both in and 'managing' was punitive and powerful. Simon's approach fails to attune us sufficiently to the fact that all parties do not share the same interests. There was also the danger of a drift towards what had been called case history (Plummer 1983). This case study would have been weaker if it only told the story of the process. It had a wider purpose than that, to show how the communities under scrutiny managed and mediated the imposed solution to an externally perceived problem, of teacher status/quality/engagement.

Typical criticism of case study work are concerned with issues of generalisable outcomes, cross-checking difficulties and accusations of selectivity, biased personal positions and the perceived subjectivity that goes with that position (Nisbet and Watt 1984). I would argue that reflexive structures used within my multiple case study ought to 'smooth' the various influences and positions across the institutions into 'core' experiences. Scott (2000) in his work on realism and education research, has suggested that it is important to acknowledge structural and interactional influence in reviewing policy implementation. The Heads' background, experiences, expectations, ideology, goals, negotiating skills, knowledge of self and knowledge of context, all impinged on the intended and unintended outcomes as they applied the Threshold Process. The

process of application was also subject to the contextual factors of the institution and the interactional factors of the local environment. Just as I rejected the objectivist certainty of figures in explaining events, the case study only had validity if it was honest about the differences that existed between institutions and their experiences, and offered propositions that were based on reflecting a collective experience. The case study is multi-faceted. What was my role as the central researcher? Stake (1995) says that I have to be prepared to be teacher, advocate, evaluator, biographer, theorist and interpreter. To fulfil these variable roles the in-depth investigation of the case study had to be enriched by a mix of methods. These dimensions were negotiated across the group.

The main method was to interview individuals as the events unfolded (Table 1 page 61). This was a search for understanding experiences and exploring the meanings of our experience. Given our close working relationship, knowledge of each other's schools and the unifying experience of Headship made the interview a sensible vehicle for researching. These interviews were about relationships. I have known some of these people for over a decade. The nuances, the gestures, the pauses of their conversations, the words used are signposts these I would try to recognise and pursue. We would use a 'family' honesty and communication style. This meant discussion, reflection, revision and, usually agreement on what to record. It was my research but the data of my colleagues and their participation was important. That was why there was constant negotiation and refinement to create the narrative of our experience. I coded the information into a collective voice. The coding was to identify patterns of assertion, dissent and volume within the group. In building a narrative about the Threshold Experience I acted both as a clearing centre and a referee to ensure that the research that I had ownership of was an accurate record of our and my experience.

I do not communicate with my family through questionnaires, I talk with them and for the purposes of this research the interviews were that conversation. The looseness of our shared experience meant that what we regarded as common sense needed to be explored as part of an explicit strategy. I created a structure of meetings (Table 1 page 61). These were to gather data and test and probe views both on an individual and group basis. The conversational nature of the interviews required me to have a structure during which others could hear the narrative and respond to it.

The case study format and the rapport I have with the others meant that, as they are for many interviews, response rates are not an issue (Morton, Williams 1990). That already existing rapport enabled me to use unstructured interview techniques. It has been suggested there is no such thing as an unstructured interview (Wilson 1996) because the interviewer's style contains a degree of control over the interview, they have a focus for the questioning, and normal conversation has rules eg turn taking. Scott (1997) claims that his interviews have no formal structure; rather, they rely upon the 'ebb and flow' of the conversation. He claims three strengths for interviews:-

- i) interviews give access to past events
- ii) they allow the researcher access to situations where the researcher is not able to be present
- iii) they allow access to situations where the teacher refused permission for the researcher to be present

TABLE 1
STRUCTURE OF MEETINGS

| | Central High | Clifftop | Moorside | Northedge | Riverside | Valley | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Event | ACTORS | | | | | | Timing |
| Research Agreement | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 Group I | Cross ref with Moorside Group 1 | March 2000 |
| Training 1 | Group I 1/1 | Group I 1/1 | Group I Telephone | Group I 1/1 | Group I 1/1 | Group I 1/1 (DH) | March 2000 |
| Training 2 | Telephone Group 1 | Telephone N/A | 1/1 Group 1 | 1/1 Group 1 | Telephone Group 1 | Cross ref with Moorside Group 1 | June 2000 |
| Implementation | 1/1 Group 1 Telephone | 1/1 Group 1 Telephone | 1/1 Group 1 Telephone | 1/1 Group 1 Telephone | 1/1 Group 1 N/A | 1/1 Group 1 N/A | June 2000 July 2000 |
| NUT Challenge Halt | Group II Group I | Group II Group I | Group II Group I | Group II Group I | Group II Group I | Group II Group I | July 2000 |
| Restart | Telephone Group I | Telephone Group I | Telephone Group I | Telephone Group I | N/A Group I | Cross ref with Northedge Group 1 | Nov 2000 |
| Assessor | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 Group I | 1/1 (DH) Group 1 | Dec 2000/Jan 2001 |
| Post-Completion 1 | Group 1 x 2 | Group 1 x 2 | Group 1 x 2 | Group I x 2 | Group I x 2 | Group I x 2 | May 2001 |
| Post-Completion 2 | 1/1 | 1/1 | 1/1 | 1/1 | 1/1 | 1/1 (cross ref DH) | June/July 2001 |
| Final Reflection and Agreement | Group I x 2 1/1 | Group I x 2 1/1 | Group I X 2 1/1 | Group I x 2 1/1 | Group I x 2 1/1 | Group I x 2 1/1 | October 2001 Dec 2002 |

Key: 1/1 = indicates interviewing a colleague Head in a one to one meeting at their school.
Group I = this indicates a meeting of the five participants and me in group discussion. It could be either a specific meeting or added to the end of another local Head's meeting
Group II = as Group I but includes three other Heads who wanted to participate. Data was not collected for their schools and the contribution was limited to reporting general experience of the Threshold.
Telephone = indicates a none face to face discussion.
Cross-reference = either a check to ensure that the agreement on an issue was clearly understood or, if internally with DH, a check to see if what I had recorded for my own school was what DH had perceived as happening over a particular event.
X 2 = two group meetings for that event.

The latter was not germane to my research because the individual teacher would be 'voiced' only in the actions of the implementor (Head). The naturalistic, confessional and conversational themes in constructed interviews are equally capable of being interpreted as loosely structured. By accepting that interviews have procedural, structural and contextual dimensions, I did not diminish the conversational nature of the social event of each interview. Rather I viewed each interview as an occasion to learn. My aim was to understand their experience and, in turn reflect upon my own experience understandings of Threshold. For these reasons I used semi-structured interviews.

At the far side of the continuum, from unstructured to highly structured interview, there is the ideal standardised schedule consisting of:-

1. the same questions to each respondent using the same wording with the context/procedures of asking the questions consistent along with format and method.
2. an assumption that all respondents understand the questions in the same way. Should they not then prompts or subsidiary information must be non-directive.
3. respondents are motivated to continue to answer questions by uniformity of context, time and motivational influence from the interviewer.
4. the interviewer can categorise responses into a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. Such categories can be simple or complex.

In working a schedule across six institutions, I could see a standardised schedule would have merit, however it was too inflexible for my needs. My questioning (Appendix 2) was semi-structured; I needed flexibility in order to address issues of time and place variations. It is also possible to criticise the semi-structured interview by noting that in its context/situated focus, the demands of the interactive context make the interview

meaningless beyond that context in which it occurs. I would counter that by stating that if the methods I used were used again with the same respondents they would produce broadly similar results and indicate reliability. In making that claim I also accept that the data will likely be influenced by the passage of time. In essence, I take the view that there is no reason for individuals to be untruthful.

The semi-structured interview schedule I used takes its format from Drever (1995) by:-

- being a formal encounter on an agreed subject and 'on the record'
- the main questions were set by me to create an overall structure
- I used prompts and probes to fill in the structure
- there were a mixture of closed and open questions
- interviewees were given a fair degree of freedom: what to talk about, how much to say, how to express it
- the participants shared a common framework of references

What I had not anticipated about interviews was the burden placed on me with regard to the volume of material that eventually emerged and the time it would take for me to process and manage that data. Time to conduct the interviews and time to process the material produced was a problem. At the time of negotiating access I had agreed to make notes because I wanted to record non-verbal indicators. Each interview ran to many pages. These were then shown to each of my colleagues and discussed. Skill was required to manage the practical aspects of the work. The planning and preparation for the interviews and conduct of the interviews was important. There were also sticky moments when an interviewee asked question beyond the remit eg 'what did X say?' To have answered they would have broken the agreement we had to respect our individual situations. The technique I used had to be kept simple if the research was to be managed

effectively. I used prompts if my colleagues did not understand and probes to confirm, clarify, explain, connect or extend information.

Analysing the interviews proved to be laborious. I was looking for key words. Once found, I had to ensure that those words were being used in the same way by everyone. Two Heads often used 'performance' to mean public examination results whilst another used the word to mean 'satisfactory'. I had agreed to keep everyone informed through summarising and creating a synthesis, an agreed 'voice' of our experience with Threshold. This meant reflective sessions with my colleagues to review the data. The single person sessions were hard. We were talking as equals and competitors. Securing a clear understanding of Threshold in each school required me to probe. Heads are ever more mindful of 'them' whether that be LEA, Governors, DFEE or OFSTED. My colleagues sometimes put up barriers and disguised their true feelings, however, my professional intimacy gave me the space and permission to 'dig' for their views about what they felt was taking place.

Only on a few occasions was there the need to remind my colleagues that they were protected from harm. Authenticity demanded rigour from all participants in responding to the project. Procedures and personal behaviour were scrutinised by collective reflection. Interviews were reliable to gather data but the subsequent analysis of the interview data emerged from intense discussion. I made this commitment even though it drained me.

As my work progressed, I found some of the interviews were very moving. Many of the group interviews were also a joy. They contained much that has been claimed for them;

data rich, flexible, stimulating, recall aiding, cumulative and elaborative (Fontana and Frey 1994) but for me the 'buzz' was that we were talking about the values and beliefs that me and my colleagues shared rather than the usual 'fire fighting' bureaucratic trivia that is placed on schools. The ice certainly creaked and at times I/we slipped off course, but it was good to be there, to be 'doing' the research.

Just as interviews were part of the case study, I also included some observation and fieldwork as part of my data gathered. It is almost impossible for me to accept that research techniques could be neatly separated. The reality is messier. Techniques folded into each other; what I observed in my own and my colleague schools could not be ignored. I was most definitely a participant observer because I was a Head going through the process. There was a need to observe, to note the unusual, the 'give away', the triggers showing emotions and values. This I did by recording 'notable' observations and sharing them with my colleagues. To access these there had to be a trade off between detail and scope (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). I was also a complete participant (Elliott 1991) validating my own observations not by absolute or marginal agreement but through reflexivity, and respondent validation. Though concurrent with interviewing, observing attitudes or emotions took time but my style meant that observation focused on the out of the ordinary that signalled turbulence rather than the mundane. It is the unusual that indicates change and the change that shows the distinctions between what has gone before and a new situation. The meanings of actions and constructs are observations to be recorded; they add 'tone' to the 'voice' of the interviews.

My forays out into the schools can be described as fieldwork and the notes made on these visits were important. The distillation of the notes into a reflective record as negotiated with the respondent(s) was an interesting process. There was a difference between when the individual interviews were preceded by group meetings and vice versa. It seemed that one to one discussions followed by group meetings led to new thoughts and reinterpretations of individual positions. When it was the other way round (group first, individual second) colleagues appeared to have taken each other's positions into account when responding as individuals. My job as the researcher was to make sense of these 'tones' and share the outcomes with the group. What Miles and Huberman (1994) called the 'reducing' process could best be described as a 'rendering down'. The carcass of the notes was subjected to heat (often heated debate), picked over (like vultures?) until the bones of the common ground remained. I feel that considerable symbolic importance was present in the agreement to destroy notes after the substance had been agreed or where disagreements were recorded. The notes, like the interviews, had the ability to create harm if taken out of context. The process of negotiating, defining and identifying the core detail was a mirror of the realignment that was going on in our professional lives. We felt we were being hurt by what was happening with this policy; we did not want to compound this but by damaging each other unless it silenced our 'voice' or limited our understanding.

The final research strand was the document analysis. We could only agree to two sources. The first was *The Times Educational Supplement*. This was the only non-official source that we all read and the one most likely to reflect the opinions of teachers over the period of implementation. The starting point was often an article or editorial, though often the letters were interesting. We used these to sense what was

'hot' or 'not' through discussion. A discussion could arise at the end of one of our regular meetings or by telephone. Broadly this position was justified by events as reporting/editorial comment changed on the issues surrounding the Threshold Process where I, or any colleague, could draw attention to the change. A crude but useable discourse analysis was adopted:-

- i) The social - where/who was the audience?
- ii) The conflict - are these different messages/emphases?
- iii) The hierarchical - which information had the most status?

This is the style of Jupp (1996) but the documentary analysis of the 'TES' articles was interpretivist in the sense that what struck one/all/some would be used as the basis for reflective scrutiny as well as how important we felt it was. Our research 'noise' was being placed alongside the 'noises' that were in the 'TES' as a mirror of our understanding.

The other strand of documents were the various Government documents. We all received the Government papers because the DfEE was determined that no Head should miss the messages concerning Threshold. I included some comments from the other press sources as the first round process was completed. My justification was that the official interpretation of the process and the participant (Head) interpretation of the process could just as well be interpreted by 'outsiders' in a different way.

Closing Notes

The word 'researcher' sounds so calm, dignified and organised. My trip out on the ice sheet of research was just as scary as my 1959 stroll on the frozen pond. Testing the capacity, rigour and achievability of the research was akin to jumping up and down on that ice. It was a self-imposed challenge. Ultimately I could only set out to research in the knowledge that I would have to cope with challenges as I went along. Research is exhausting. However, despite this, the case study, built up interviews and observation, facilitated by fieldwork and reflected in contemporary documents was the 'voice' of some of my colleagues and I as we participated in the implementation of the Threshold Policy. Validity lies in the recognition of others that this is genuine and truthful because if they did not share these challenges, then they recognise the basis of its possibility. Standing on the bank is safe and sensible; launching out on the ice of research changed me. I hoped that it might have a similar impact on my research colleagues. For the reader to understand my colleague researchers, I have to describe their individual contexts and characteristics. Their story begins in the following shard and new chapter of this narrative.

Shard 5

People, Places and Politics: The Participant Headteachers and Their Schools

It is now time to introduce you to my colleagues. Before doing that, I want to start by telling a joke; one that sums up the underlying difficulties of implementing national policy at local level. The joke is about power, local understandings, insights and relationships. The joke is:

A traveller in an expensive car is lost in the countryside despite having a map. He is frustrated and bewildered because the road signs are misleading, they all point in different directions to the same place. Seeing a yokel leaning against a gate the traveller winds down the window and asks;

“How do I get to Donegal from here?”

The yokel responds;

“I wouldn’t start from here”.

How wise that yokel is, he knows where he is and has security in that knowledge. The traveller has the wealth but the nature of the local conditions means that the power is with the yokel. If the traveller is not prepared to negotiate and accept the truth of the yokel’s answer then he is going nowhere quickly but he has to assess the risks of taking that course of action. Ultimately the greater resources of the traveller might well influence the outcomes of the meeting, however, in this initial conversation they are of limited use. What the joke does underline is that power can be relative and whilst all the ‘yokels’ in the many forms of this joke are from groups that appear to be regarded as ‘inferior’, they have, at that moment, control. A national Threshold Process policy produced for the highways of Westminster could well have been modified by the time it was applied in the country lanes of a shire county. The objectivity of the training

guidelines becomes the subjectivity of local circumstances in application. What the Government (the wealthy traveller) had to judge was whether it could achieve the desired destination ie reform of teachers' work, without the help of the yokel (the Headteacher). The sheer volume of eligible applicants during the first round of applications meant that it could not. Like the map and the signposts of the joke the external assessors and the training manual/pro formas should have assured the right direction. However, the local knowledge of and about the candidates and school circumstances was influential in what was ultimately a set of confused circumstances regarding the first round of Threshold. In pursuing a reform, a series of new problems emerged as the policy rolled out. The proposed solution (Threshold) became problematic because of actual and potential resistance to the reforms. The local decision maker (Head) was given greater freedom in assessing eligibility in order to secure the long-term prize of changing the working conditions of teachers. Giving ground to local circumstances in Round One of the Threshold process may well mediate the Government's intentions in the longer term. Only in the longer term might we see whether the judgement to accept greater local institutional direction will mediate the effect of the centrist agenda in the process. Not all roads are signposted or shown on maps but that does not mean that the locals do not know where they are and where they lead.

Variation was a problem for the Government during the Threshold process. It was also an issue for me as a researcher and one that I needed to address. I must honestly represent the variations across the six schools participating in the project and acknowledge the potential of a seventh influence in the LEA. The balance between reporting differences and identifying unifying features/characteristics of the experience

is a dilemma for qualitative research. Lincoln and Denzin (1994) describe 'A Fifth Moment' when the story is drawn together and stock is taken of the events that are being researched. During this research there have been many 'Fifth Moments' when stock has been taken and a story was constructed from the fragments of the research. Qualitative researchers need to be adept at performing a large number of tasks as they attempt to provide solutions to concrete problems. In defining the present and coping with it, I can see there is the possibility of a problem of representation as 'smoothness' is created by ironing out the 'roughness' of the raw material, whether this is sourced from a multiplicity of accounts, (as in my six Headteacher case study), or by the responses to the range of qualitative research methods I used. I constructed a narrative with the pieces emerging from the six locations, where at each point I was dealing with, to use a French term, a concierge. That term has two current meanings. The first is the traditional caretaker/doorkeeper guardian of the original French. Recently a second usage has emerged in relation to expensive hotels. It means a 'fixer', someone who will sort out problems, find the tickets for that overbooked show and can be left to arrange things. In dealing with my partners in the research I was both constructing the final form but also negotiating with the local 'fixer' (Head) who in turn was also the 'guardian' of the process as a concierge. The Head was the intermediary between central government and the teachers, fixing the process whilst managing the guidelines. Not surprisingly there were times when I was not sure whether I was the traveller of the joke, the yokel or both at once. What I did was to agree a format for describing the Headteachers and their schools, (including my own), after considerable discussion/reflection about how this might be done fairly and truthfully. The research made more sense if the various locations and environments were described. Needless to say, I never used the term 'yokel' in these discussions.

Nisbet and Watt (1984) describe a number of risks in reporting case studies eg sensationalism, censorship. All had the potential to apply to my research. Before describing the Headteachers and schools I tested to see if the dangers could be found. Some were present, so I then exercised a mixture of further discussion and editing. Pomposity is not unknown in Headteachers. The profound opinion of one Head may be the banal statement of another, so that judgement had to be exercised by me as the core researcher to stop the research from degenerating into a cosy anecdotal wander. That would not serve the research aim of explaining how this phenomenon was handled by those charged with its implementation. A way of avoiding these pitfalls without slipping into journalism had to be found. To understand our experience of Threshold our own starting points had to be clear.

I wrote descriptions of each school and its Head. These were created by discussion with the individuals and other members of the group and my own perceptions. These were then reviewed. Squirming through my own review was awful. One Head refuted the group comments and threatened to leave the project. Critique was the aim, criticism the risk. Generally the discussions were fruitful but challenging. When we joined together in the project I told my co-researchers that it would require us to move outside our safety zones. I would share the accounts I produced with my colleagues, but the overall responsibility for the research lay with me. The integrity of qualitative research is in truth and honesty and we could not enslave that integrity by having our own exclusive versions of the truth. Critical research talks about resistance, but the source and strength of that resistance had to be placed against the template of the observed characteristics and the perception of others. Once anger had subsided the Head accepted that some of the observations of his peers had some foundation. From that heated session there

emerged six descriptions that were not all defining but rather had an indicative tone. However, I start with a seventh environmental influence, the LEA.

The LEA

It would have been perfectly proper for me to ignore the LEA in this matter. The DfEE had. LEAs had no 'official' role in The Threshold Process. Contact was made directly with each Headteacher. Threshold training was commissioned and directed by the DfEE. To moderate the process, assessors were appointed on fixed term personal contracts by a private contractor, CEA (Cambridge Education Associates). The Government had decided to side-step LEAs. This was a very clear political signal that the reforms would be targeted at individual Heads without the filter of LEAs. It is too soon to know what the Cabinet political papers will eventually reveal about this decision, but a possible view is that the role of the LEA would have been a further unwelcome barrier. What it did mean is that every Head in England and Wales had to respond to the DfEE and undergo training with them.

Signals are important. Meyer and Rowan (1988) argue that policy is often disconnected from structures. By ignoring the ritual classification of the LEA as local agent, the more loosely coupled school → LEA → DfEE structure suddenly became closely coupled Head → Secretary of State. Time will tell if the Government felt the LEAs could not be relied upon to do the job required. Perhaps they were influenced by OFSTED inspections of LEAs that appeared to suggest most were not knowledgeable about the school's they maintained. Meyer and Rowan (1988) suggested that the 'vagueness' of the existing structures in organisations undergoing change encourages a

‘pass the parcel’ approach where the energy of initiatives is dissipated by long lines of reinterpretation. Direct contact removes dissipation, the message is kept intact. A desire for a stronger accountability/audit regime made it justifiable for the DfEE to ignore LEAs. However, that did not mean the LEA was not a political factor. Rather, it meant that it had to redefine the basis of its political influence.

This research took place in a Shire County. This was a place where the six schools of this project had felt that they were under-funded and ignored by County Hall. The resentment is deep. Heads in this research feel that the urban areas of the county receive extra funding, have more influence, and yet produce poor results when compared to the rural areas. Like all myths, there is some truth in these concerns, and certainly tales from the past are used to interpret the present in a way that justified the resentment. Just as the Heads started with ‘baggage’ in their personalities, they also had ‘baggage’ opinions about the LEA. It is no accident that this corner of the county might be called the Grant Maintained hot bed. It contained two out of the three Grant Maintained comprehensives and the only Grant Maintained junior school in the LEA. Several schools openly considered Grant Maintained Status and when the county realised the danger it used Academic Councils to pressurise Secondary Schools. It was this same channel that the LEA used to establish a position on The Threshold Process. The LEA wanted to be involved, not excluded.

Secondary schools are usually large enough to run many of the functions that LEAs used to run. Having bypassed the LEA over Threshold implementation, the secondary schools were quite prepared to deal directly with Cambridge Education Associates and the DfEE. Small, often very small, junior schools are not so confident. Each secondary

school is part of an Academic Council which is composed of several junior schools and the main secondary school. The LEA made contact with all the academic councils offering advice and help in implementing The Threshold. The written material was just a 'top and tailed' copy of what we already had from the DfEE. But it was reassuring for the small schools, as they were faced with the likelihood of judging a single colleague with whom they had worked for decades. The LEA advice gave legitimacy to the decision-making process, though, as I indicate elsewhere, fear that the applications would be subjected to close scrutiny was ill founded. The cleverness of the move was that by using the Academic Councils, the secondary schools either joined in the advice sessions from the LEA or looked disinterested in working on common challenges. For some secondaries there is a need to recruit every child they can. Even for those who were oversubscribed it would not have been sensible to alienate partner schools within the Academic Council. Relationships need to be maintained. By moving quickly, the LEA had put itself back into the loop of influence, having been excluded at the centre by the DfEE. With education being one of the biggest spending departments, no councillor or officer is going to be pushed to one side without a fight. No wonder the signposts were misleading; more than one group was signposting the route. That brought me back to the 'yokels'. It was with them that the immediate duty lay of assessing and passing/failing. They were the people with the local knowledge. They had history and their own style.

The Heads and their Schools

Earlier I described how the picture of each Head and their school emerged. The research had to have a sense of authenticity (Atkinson 1990) within the group if we were to feel secure that it had validity outside the group. That meant scrutinising the account until it rang true. The price of being in the research group was to accept the foremost rule of honesty. The descriptions of the Heads and the schools they work in are an amalgam of my views and the perceptions of the others in the research group. The Heads are described with the background information about each school is presented alphabetically. This was not reporting on the Threshold Process for each school; that comes later. It does, however, illuminate the climate of each school and the characteristics of the Heads felt to be influential on the conduct of applying the process. These issues were personally brought up; it can be inferred, then, that such issues were important to them. These issues were then reflected upon by the group who could sometimes add other issues. It was where they were starting from, it was their 'here', the place that did not quite fit the training manual examples. But they knew the locale better than the policy makers. Each Head had to create their own journey to the destination from a separate starting point. They were starting from 'here', because in their view they had no choice.

Central High has Peter Williams as Head. The school had 1500 students aged 11 – 18 years on roll during the first round of Threshold and had applied to become a specialist school. Peter was 53 years old and it is his second headship. Having worked as a Deputy Head in the authority for some years he had applied for the Headship of a school in the North of England and was successful. For personal reasons he wished to

return to the South. Good fortune appeared to come in the guise of the newly vacant Headship at Central High and he was delighted to be appointed. He was inexperienced, with just over a year of Headship, however, he wanted to stamp his mark on the school. As Peter put it, he wanted to show the LEA that they were wrong when they had not appointed him to a Headship in the past. At his age, another Headship was unlikely. He rapidly pushed through changes. His power lay in his position but he had not gained the skills that effectively supported that position. Pfeffer (1992) indicates that using the power of positional authority without strategies and tactics to deploy that power is to misunderstand where the power comes from. Power is partly consensual, and Peter did not seek consensus, though, in that action, he was using the power of Headship.

His immediate task on joining Central High was to manage a redundancy. Such matters are always difficult but several factors conspired to make it particularly awkward. The previous Head had tended the staff and propagated a 'Central High' culture of shared development over many years. He had left through ill-health. Peter was very much of the opinion that efficiency and effectiveness would create the school he wanted. A popular teacher faced redundancy and uproar followed. At the same time he introduced a new way of managing pupil behaviour that removed the role of Year Head. Peter described this period to me as:-

“They just wanted X back, they weren’t prepared to consider change”

“I had the right to manage in the best way”.

These quotes highlighted what might be considered a more 'straight line' technical process management style on Peter's part. Subsequently, the teacher selected for redundancy was saved by another teacher volunteering to be redundant. Governors seized on this to avoid a damaging internal battle, but it left Peter feeling unsupported. He described himself as isolated by his actions. This influenced his feelings about the community. Peter had an SMT who was hostile to him in some cases, while indifferent in others. Pastoral teams had been significantly altered but the replacement structure was not yet in place; there was, only a weakly developed and evolving replacement structure. This was the school climate in which the Threshold Process began. League table results were falling, pupil behaviour was becoming an issue and staff were seeking new posts. Peter responded by recruiting more students from outside his normal area in an attempt to increase the size of the staff, in turn diluting the influence of the opposition. The school climate was volatile and Peter unsettled. As we discussed this, we agreed that this influenced Peter's approach to the Threshold Process.

Charles Whitbread, the Clifftop Head, had a degree of passion and volatility about the research. He had threatened to withdraw after the group review of his school. At that time I offered him a dissenting appendix as in the research agreement. However, he declined this preferring to work within the group. His behaviour could have had a number of triggers. Clifftop is the only 11 – 16 and the smallest in the group with just 860 students. Charles has been Head since 1997 when he was internally promoted. He is the only 'partner' to be promoted from within and whilst there is no reason why internal promotion should be a stigma it does appear from the number of times it was mentioned, that it might be an issue. The upset at review stage came about because it was suggested that the direction of the school was influenced by its strong union

representation. Most schools have high rates of union membership. So what was different. At Clifftop local opinion was that the NUT was excessively influential. Whatever the truth of this common sense, it still had an important effect on the perception of the school and its practices. Charles bridles at this view because it continues the pattern of 'less real' Headship; in other words, that as a Head, appointed from inside he is also compromised by a strongly unionised staff. However, as the Threshold Process began my observations following visits and discussions with Charles confirmed local opinion. He administered the process in conjunction with the union. My impression was that the union co-operated in the interests of the members not the students attending the school. Talking to Susan Robertson at The Graduate School of Education, Bristol University about research she was doing in a Bristol school, I became aware of a new trend towards union membership as a response to the personalisation of teacher contracts based on individual performance in a City Technology College. This was not the background at Clifftop. Here we are dealing with a situation that developed in the mid 1970s and has not changed since. At Clifftop the implementation of Threshold was against a background of strong union membership and opposition to individual rewards for teachers. Charles was required to assess eligible candidates in a school where he receives no help to inform his judgements.

John Ponder at Moorside appeared in my opinion is a very different character. He has been at the school for 15 years. The roll in 2001 was 1530 with students aged 11 – 18 years. It is also a Specialist School. John came to mind when I read Wallace and Hall's 1994 book about the Senior Management Team. John understands symbolic actions; how to use micro politics directed at sub-groups amongst the staff to influence. Indeed, his use of influence and balancing of contradictory interests has allowed him to change

the school from a mediocre backwater to an exciting learning community. The dual metaphor of political and cultural models, of conflict and consensus, are not so embedded as in the strongest SMT models because the only constant is John, but they are present. Moorside has suffered from innovation overload. Twice John went for Grant Maintained status and twice failed. John does not resist the pressures to change; he welcomes them. His school is involved in everything. Increasingly, Heads are required to be 'bilingual' (Gewirtz et al 1995) speaking managerially in some areas but speaking in the generically socialised teacher-mode elsewhere. It would appear that 'managerialism' sits comfortably with him. However, the double attempt at Grant Maintained status in the face of community resistance indicates a certain single mindedness. John speaks positively of the private sector. He has personal links to the private sector and speaks about freer controls in the sector. "Direct responsibility" is a term he uses. "None of these LEA people giving mixed messages" is another. They give credence to the group view that John is very strong on formal monitoring and the need for conformity from teachers. This is a view of compliance management leading to outcomes (Russell 1996); it is also a view reinforced in the regularly repeated messages from OFSTED and The Threshold Process about monitoring and evaluation. Moorside is packed with young staff, unlike most schools in this area. They appear to be at home with portfolio careers and new reward structures. That permits John to be a manager in a way that the other schools would find difficult.

Northedge does not have a young staff. It is an ex-grammar school with some of the staff still in post from those old grammar days. It is one of the ex Grant Maintained schools in the group. The Head, Graham Brown, focuses on the difficulties eg. split site, under pressure from its close neighbour Central High. The difficulties of Peter

Williams at Central have helped Northedge, but Graham Brown appears to accept the marketing bonus arising out of Peter Williams' problems without enthusiasm. There have been some staffing issues that have created negative publicity. Staff do not feel supported. That makes relationships within the school difficult. Issues of trust and distancing between SMT and the teachers dominate. The phrases 'loss of enjoyment' (Marshall and Ball 1999) and 'depressive guilt' indicate the working arrangements in the school. In one discussion some of Graham's peers proffered the opinion that he uses rewards to control and sees The Threshold Process as a reward. If reward suggests a special act (Ironsides and Seifert 1995), then the speciality of the act is marred at Northedge by a sense of distrust and betrayal. Trust in the fairness of the Threshold Process is based on trust within the institution. That trust did not seem to be present.

Richard Thomas at Riverside is a sailor. In knowing that, it makes far more sense that he is 'sailing' towards retirement at 59 and his school is 'sailing' along with him. Riverside is not a pressurised environment. The school functions well and Richard is a charming man and very good company. Riverside has become smaller over the years. He is not bothered. Good relationships exist within the school. The political complexities of the work place that need trust to work (Treleaven 1994) are fine because Richard is open with everyone. For him the Threshold Process was about:-

"A pay rise concealed from the Treasury".

(Richard Thomas)

The implication of that stance was that the procedures outlined during training could be safely ignored. Other Heads of the research group were disgruntled that Richard's actions of telling his staff that everyone would pass Threshold, because it would mean difficulties for them in their own schools. They objected to his attitude Richard

countered by remarking he was retiring. The ‘yokel’ on the gate has the power if the only sanctions that can be applied are irrelevant. It is the driver that is lost, not the leaner on the gate.

That brings me finally to my school. The Valley School. It is my second Headship and I have now been in post for 11 years at this 11 – 18 year old comprehensive with 1320 students. Building and defining my profile for both my personally produced outline and the subsequent reviews with my peers was difficult. I like to think that I take pride in the two listings in the top 100 schools inspected by OFSTED; successive Achievement Awards and our popularity in this community. What I did not realise until the peer review was that other partners saw me as over performing. They claimed my style was not about vision but winning. ‘Leadership Density’ (Beare et al 1993) was not consistent but concerned with developing a ‘competitive edge’. To support these claims they claimed:-

“You broke the Staff Association” (Graham Brown)

“Being top is driving you” (Richard Thomas)

By this I understood that they saw me as determined to do well even if it meant being confrontational with teachers. These hurt. It is another reason why I have found the research uncomfortable. I am beginning to question the way I work. When we discussed the issue of the Staff Association it was clear that my peers’ perceptions were not the same as mine. From my standpoint the Staff Association that my predecessors had faced was about deciding which students were allowed on certain courses and when teachers were prepared to keep parents informed. I saw it as denying student entitlement, something I was not prepared to accept for my children who attended the school so why would I wish it for other students? It shocked me that these

arrangements existed so I sought a change. This meant loosening the grip of the Staff Association. The link between changing the Staff Association and our later successes was never made by me but was made by my peers in review. In all, the image that I had of Valley being a successful and respected school was repackaged by my peers as Valley, successful, competitive and driven by the Head. My privileged position as writer of this story, and editor of the collective story has allowed me to reply to the review in a way that my 'partners' cannot. Though all of my colleague Heads expressed opinions at the review I have had longer to think about them. While on one hand I want to point out that the view depends where the viewer stands. I have learnt, to my own discomfort, that my 'friends' did not see the same view as me. The same could well be true of the teachers I/we worked with. Threshold was taking place in schools where the Head's view is intensely personal. I need to consider this more. Whilst I have had the right of reply, it has made me think. There is work for me to do beyond this research.

We can see each Head and their schools as being different, a shard of colour and complexity in their own right. I say this, as there were, and continue to be, differences between the six of us engaged in this process. At times we agree and other times we agree to disagree.

The oft-heard cry of the bored child on a long journey is 'are we there yet?'. My son who suffered from car sickness has his own version, 'are we here?'. The answer was always that we were definitely 'here'! The 'here' for these six Heads and a LEA desperate to retain influence were all different. The 'here' of the DfEE was different again. The concept of social assets (Robertson 2000) indicates how the connections and social obligations facilitate the realisation or achievement of strategic ends. Without

these 'social assets', institutions do not work as effectively. The issues are about relationships, information, obligations, sanction and local arrangements. The sociality of these Heads is reflected in their behaviour during this time. They are all middle-aged men in a part of the country not known for leading edge work. Rather, stability is the backdrop against which the social assets are placed. Elsewhere it might be different, but Robertson is right that it is 'on the ground' that events take place. Teachers are engaged in social action and form a social collectivity that mediates antagonistic or exploitative relations. When the 'yokel' stated that given a free choice he would not start a journey from that particular 'here', the foundation was the certainty that circumstances are not universally the same across the system. These six Headteachers of comprehensives in one small corner of England all had reason to consider themselves 'unique'. As explained above, that 'uniqueness' was typically seen differently by others. It is possible that this 'uniqueness' would be recognised in other schools as a qualified 'uniqueness' that applies to them, a 'uniqueness' in the mind of the interpreter as an echo of social locality. Universal training to provide cohesion to the Threshold Process was given. It might have been beneficial to set up a performance management system prior to Threshold Assessment, but that was not the starting point the DfEE wanted. The 'here' had to have the quickest access to the reform motorway so we were placed on the slip road and then given directions through the training that we were all required to follow. The security of that position held by the DfEE was in doubt as the training unfolded. We six were now caught in the slipstream of the 'process'. The six were to be exposed to what we were to do to our colleagues back at school.

Shard 6

A Grand Day Out and An Unexpected Day Out: Training Heads for the Threshold Process

This was the point at which the reality and requirement of Threshold was made clear. This was the shard of the mirror where we could see a reflection of what was intended; an image of the final picture. I have used upper case for 'A Grand Day Out' to denote two features of the Threshold Training. The first was the sense of adventure that pervaded the period prior to training. The second was in tribute to Nick Park's cartoon characters Wallace and Gromit who had 'A Grand Day Out' that turned out to be exciting, but also farcical. Thus, it was for the six of us. There was a palpable feeling that this was something big, different, important and unusual. Each year we hold a Veterans' Day at school and these now very elderly ex-servicemen have told me that secretly they relished being called up to war because it was different, it was a break from the tedium of everyday life. This attitude soon changed with experience. That was also the pattern for Heads. Back in March 2000 the Heads were 'called up', issued with their kit and drilled/trained in a style that could, without too much distortion, be viewed as a military operation. We were being prepared to launch a campaign. No wonder the atmosphere seemed a mixture of anticipation and fear as we entered into an activity that was so different from anything we had done before. That it turned out to have elements of Wallace and Gromit did not diminish that feeling, it just reflected the fact that intentions are sometimes lost to serendipity.

There was an additional environmental 'Grand' characteristic in the choice of venue. It was a hotel so prestigious that the word Grand or Imperial was a natural epithet. The

Government was spending considerable money on this training and we were being treated as though we were top businessmen. Heads are used to slightly care-worn educational institutions so this was a shock. There were liveried staff, real coffee and expensive biscuits. Most Heads do not lack confidence, and certainly not my colleagues; a few cheeky colleagues even drove up to the main entrance and handed their car keys to the doorman and left him to park the vehicle. The location was to impress, to set a tone and expectation that this was important. It succeeded, though reflecting on it later in the day and the subsequent unexpected day, there were other forces at play. The intention was to flatter Heads, perhaps even at a subconscious level to try and bribe the Heads into co-operation. There were other advantages for the course deliverers. By gathering the Heads in one, exclusive, place the 'message' could be controlled and delivered more easily. Cambridge Education Associates could check more easily that trainers were properly delivering the script to the invited audience. The choice of venue was a deliberate message. The LEAs and the educational establishment were excluded. They were either not wanted or not trusted to deliver the package in the way required. Normally we would expect the LEA to be involved in delivering the training. This pact was between the Heads and the Government so the place and time to roll out the contract was on a site where security and consistency of instruction could be managed. That required a non-educational venue, free from the pollution of 'outsiders' like the LEA who might learn the secrets. 'Grand' was an apt description for the audacity of the concept, the choice of venue and the work that needed to be completed. However, 'Grand' is only one letter different to 'grind'. In outlining my experience of this training and reflecting upon the experience of my fellow Heads the letter 'I' becomes a significant indicator as to how the 'Grand' became a 'grind' for me. This campaign was an emotional cold war, an unfulfilling adventure and I describe it as a

participant in the front lines, a conscripted combatant in the campaign. My fellow Heads reported a similar unease; a feeling that we were being sold a package. Attractive wrappings can conceal unwanted goods.

We agreed that I would collect the data arising from these experiences by interview with each Head and then, at a later date, by cross-referencing these reports/summaries at a group meeting (Table 1 page 61). My purpose was to illustrate the experience through a critical collective voice. The process was one of discussion, reflection, review and agreement. It was analysis/coding to define common ground. At times this was by using a simplest of questions for the whole of the group (see Appendix II). On other occasions the questions were very directed and personal to the individual/institution.

All six Heads involved received their 'call up' papers in January 2000. We were sent three separate sheets. The first was a letter about a specific Threshold Training Event. Using the word 'Event' emphasises the importance the DfEE were placing on this training. The words 'national performance standards' also appeared in relation to the teaching profession. We were left in no doubt that this was significant and that we, the Heads, would be making judgements about candidates (teachers). Ominously, the school's unique number appeared in the top right hand corner. Schools have numbers galore, but traditionally the key numbers have been the LEA number and the exam number for each school. No longer is this true. OFSTED have a different unique number for each school and it was this number that appeared on the invitation. Karen Legge (1995) has written on how 'hard' human resource management is used to enforce change and how, in moving from a 'soft' developmental mode to a 'hard' compliance mode the individual needs to feel that is they who are under scrutiny. All

six of us felt under scrutiny; the use of the unique OFSTED number was in fact a coded message. That is the number of the PANDA and the number that appears on OFSTED Inspection reports. We felt the DfEE was telling us it knew where we lived. The first sheet had required a reply as to whether you were attending or not attending the ‘event’ designated for your area. The DfEE ‘strongly recommended’ that you attended. The second sheet was less diplomatic.

Many Heads were annoyed about the second sheet that had to be faxed back to confirm (or otherwise) attendance at the designated training event. Again, it displayed the school’s unique number sending a signal which in turn generated a feeling of scrutiny. The layout appeared thus:-

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes, I am able to attend on .. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No, I regret I am unable to attend because (please specify): |
| | a) |
| | b) I shall be retiring in April 2000 <input type="checkbox"/> |

It seemed that there was only one acceptable answer, ‘Yes, I am able to attend’. The need to specify why you were unable to attend that particular session created discomfort but the fury came from the ‘I shall be retiring in April 2000 box’. The invitations had been sent out during the second half of January 2000. Our group/designated ‘event’ was in the first week of the national training programme, the last week of March 2000, yet if a Head was not participating, the retirement date was the following month - April.

Colleagues felt the message here was either Heads support the programme or retire from the school. Tales circulated that some Heads were contacting the unions to fight this imposition or becoming 'refusniks'. I do not have direct knowledge about that, but I do know what happened to a friend who is a Head.

He did not accept the invitation to attend his designated 'event'. He received a telephone call asking "why?" When he questioned why he had to attend, it was made clear that Headship required attendance and training. It would be acceptable to attend at an alternative venue, but he must be officially trained to discharge his duties towards his staff. He described the conversation with a civil servant as 'cold' and a 'threat'. He decided to attend training with the other local Heads. When he talked about this to me, he described how the menace of the disembodied voice of the civil servant calling took second place to a feeling that he was being blackmailed by the notion that his staff would suffer and lose out in the changes coming. Hargreaves (1994) has written that much of teachers' work in what he calls the Post Modern Age is tinged with guilt that we may somehow be harming or neglecting those we care for. This includes teachers. This Head's response was in part shaped by the fear that in his principled resistance he would deny his colleagues' rewards that others would gain. He did not need to be reminded that he was required to co-operate because if he did not, his people would suffer. We all complied with the request, feeling that it was better to be together for mutual support rather than with strangers who we could not talk to later in a free manner or with whom we could not compare notes as we had done to over previous initiatives. Heads are aware of consumer oriented influences in education (Bottery 1992, Ransom 1994) and dissatisfaction with Government provision (Levin 1993). In turn the pressures of new managerialism (Pollit 1993) have encouraged us to support each other

because we felt vulnerable to criticism. The intention of a quasi-market to have schools competing has had an impact on us. Perhaps we think that if one falls then we are all vulnerable. The third sheet of the 'call up' papers was the implementation timetable, however, that was overtaken by changing circumstances within weeks.

Arriving at the plush venue, we reported in. We were met by 'polished' hosts. The operation was smooth, name checked, badge issued and a training pack handed over. The badge also had a number displayed that indicated which group you belonged to. Having reviewed the way the groups were formed, and the 167 Heads sub-divided into groups we still cannot arrive at an answer I feel confident about. John Ponder and I were in the same group, so it could have been based on perceptions of success as judged by OFSTED. Certainly our regulatory (numerical!) indicators were the best of the six schools as measured by the examinations and other outcomes. But what about the dozen other Heads in our group? From what they said, it appeared that they all had some kind of 'in' with an influential group, for example, The Technology Colleges Trust.

The research group Heads were spread across three training groups. In one case, Charles Whitbread at Clifftop, was there an obvious reason, he did not have a Sixth Form. For all the Heads there was an uncomfortable feeling that someone held opinions about us and our schools that translated into training groups. The unexpected beneficial outcome was that we (our small research group) gained an overview of the training across three separate groups which we later shared. Our expectation was that the training would be similar, if not identical, across the secondary groups. While this was broadly correct, the unknown hand that created the groups by whatever means had

inadvertently put people together who were not prepared to passively accept what was being delivered by the trainers.

Before we separated into our set groups, all clutching our purple training pack, there was a 'pep' talk about the 'need' for the reform of teaching and how the day would meet the needs of the reform. The formal day began with all the Heads in the Ballroom, the lights lowered and the 'Facilitator' suit moving behind the podium to address the ranks. Research looking at how messages about public sector reform are delivered (Rhodes 1997, Walsh et al 1995) suggests that government has increasingly moved delivery functions to agencies as part of 'contractualism'. This permits the Government to steer policy from a distance. That was the sense of my experience, it was confirmed by the others during our later discussions. The company responsible was giving us a 'glitzy' message. I can imagine how these are sold to senior civil servants and politicians by companies involved in training programmes for large commercial organisations. It appeared a bold, decisive and forceful way of transmitting and reinforcing the message. But, having worked in the commercial sector I know that these jamboree sessions are often treated with cynicism because the company has 'profit' as its guiding light. However, the values of teachers are different; they are more complex. The decision to use a commercial mode of delivery had the potential to alienate Heads from the start. Talking later, the six participants in this research, felt that the introduction just washed over them.

"I glanced through my purple folder to see what it contained" (Richard Thomas)

"How do all the young teachers in these videos dress so well? They must have a special DfEE allowance." (Graham Brown)

It was not that we were not interested - I have already mentioned the air of anticipation at the event. However, the introduction/'pep' talk was a sales pitch. The 'pep' talk lasted less than 20 minutes and then we were dispatched to our training groups.

After the usual introductions we began training. Our facilitator had a script. The script was timed and required him to be at set points at set times. Questions from the participants were not allowed. All questions had to be put on yellow memo notes to be answered later. We were informed of this at the start of the session by the trainer. The group were becoming restive. We were working through the purple Threshold training pack accompanied by the appropriate power point slide, monitored for time and denied the right to seek clarification or question the material. The first session closed and we moved to coffee. Mutiny was in the air. The Heads were to implement this policy! We had begun by feeling threatened with the need to retire if we would not deliver the new requirements. Now we were being denied our right to interrogate the material or question the trainer! The anticipation that created a frisson in the pre-training environment changed to tension and anger about the dogmatic nature of the training. It was dogmatic because it was one-sided, we were not learning, just listening and being told what to do. This feeling was fed back to me from the three groups where our team of Heads were placed. The irritation was not with the hapless trainers who appeared embarrassed by the strictures they were under. Rather it was with those who had designed this controlled and relentless slide after slide training to force-feed the message of Threshold to the Heads. At coffee we compared our understandings of what was happening. We did not know quite what to do, but we were not prepared to accept a day that had been described as preparation for the biggest single change about teacher employment during our careers, becoming, in reality, a litany of scripted instructions

during which there was no opportunity to participate or space made available for us to understand. We decided it would not do! Around the room similar conversations were taking place amongst small groups who knew and trusted each other. The decisions that were being taken were not whether the programme should be challenged. That seemed to be accepted by everyone I spoke to. Instead the talk was about how strong the challenge should be. Later we were to discover that dissatisfaction with the training was widespread (Barnard 2000a and Barnard 2000b). Heads across the country complained about the one-sided nature of the experience

A rumour spread that people advising on this programme were from the Army, but I have never seen any evidence that this was true. A more likely explanation is the one offered in the research findings of Hood (1995) who, in looking at other public service changes argues the real agenda is 'more for less' as the public want better services without increased costs. The real issue for us had become one of refusal to accept the training in its present form. The training programme was over-controlled. The Barnard reports I referred to earlier from the TES state that Heads walked out of training sessions. Heads in these reports claimed that 60 slides had been displayed in timed order. Looking back 'The Grand Day' reinforces my view that these sessions were held in non-educational venues to stop characters like Ted Wragg, a Professor of Education of Exeter University who regularly ridicules educational matters in his TES column, learning about the experience and criticising it. In 'The Grand', non co-operation was growing, but for our group something happened that took the anger out of the group and gave the training back to the participants.

A Wallace and Gromit Moment

The cartoon character Wallace always has the best of intentions. However, intentions rarely work out as planned. In the cartoon 'A Grand Day Out' it went wrong and continued to go wrong but it is from the first little error, that the slide begins into the unintended. That is what happened in our group.

Immediately after coffee the reassembled group started to be awkward by complaining to the trainer. The hapless trainer sought to keep to the schedule, knowing that he was being monitored by his assessors. During the first session a young man monitor had entered the room, checking that we were at the right point. On being asked by a colleague why all questions had to be written, the monitor left saying that he would come back with an answer. He did not come back.

At approximately 11.30am an older man entered the room to carry out a monitoring task. He was wearing a blazer with a badge and a club tie. More importantly, he had a clipboard. Seeing that we were not on the correct slide he made notes, looked at the trainer but did not say anything. The trainer became flustered. Someone, I cannot find out who, said "can I see your clipboard?". The Monitor reacted by clutching it to his chest as though it was a secret document. At the time and later, we wondered aloud together as to what he had written in his notes. Was it that the trainer was not on the right slide? By now, comments were coming back thick and fast. The Heads resented the idea of a man checking that we were on task to the timings of some external body when, more than anything, we needed to understand what was required of us. The Monitor could not answer the questions and summoned reinforcements. These were in

the form of two rather urbane, smartly suited officials. It was as though they were backing the Monitor up. They were asked the same questions. They gave no answers and quickly left, repeating the injunction to submit all questions in written form to be answered at some unspecified future date. The clipboard had been one control signal too many for the Heads in the room. In one sense it was good that the increasing anger had been focused on the interloper because it left the trainer as one of us rather than the envoy of coercion. The session moved from the didactic to a dialogue.

Learning requires understanding and the clipboard episode had shown that we are being treated as though the monumental change about how we worked with our staff could be delivered by a set script. Our group would not acquiesce any longer. As with the cartoon character, Wallace, on his 'Grand Day Out' the intention had been lost by error. The training organisation intended to achieve the scripted training by sending in a Monitor but the choice of 'clipboard man' had poured flammable material onto smouldering embers of resentment about the way the programme was delivered. His presence simply became the moment for a clash of values. On one hand, most Heads were resentfully prepared to work with the reform but needed to be clear as to how to proceed and how best to mitigate the school context. On the other hand, a prepared package that had been sold to the DfEE on the basis of a scripted and non-negotiable programme was one step too far. Something had to give and that monitor's intention to get the group back on track was the breaking point. We suspected the poor man's training had not included rebellious Heads. Doubtless he and well pressed suits had retreated to assure themselves that all was going well.

The remainder of the day went well for the Heads. During lunch, after asking around, I found that most secondary Heads' groups were in rebellion. Words such as 'patronising', 'shallow' and 'inflexible' buzzed through the air. Contact with colleagues from the primary sector was less open, like all underground movements, trust was based upon knowing who you were talking to. It seemed that there was similar anxiety about the usefulness and quality of the training. Our group completed the day with what at this time I considered a sensible dialogue about the Threshold Process. The script was abandoned. Our assigned trainer was happy to be released from the treadmill of the slide/script. He was an ex-Deputy Head and recognised that we could all read the material provided but our immediate concerns were centred on the nuances and interpretations of the material in the institutions we managed.

The six Heads involved in this project met twice in the weeks that followed to reflect on the first training experience. At each meeting we discussed our experiences. Notes were made, fed back and refined until we agreed that we had an account that reflected our experiences as we tried to generate a snapshot of the training experience; in the second we tried to tease out the substance of that reaction after we had heard the first reflections of others. The agreed concerns were:-

- That the training day had not addressed our needs.
- That it was unlikely that the questions submitted on paper would be answered as the Government Telephone Helpline we were asked to phone had failed to respond with anything other than what was in the script. It was likely that everyone had the script but no other guidance.
- That this would be a massive and time consuming task because:-
 - it was all to be evidence based.
 - verification of the evidence had to be completed by the Head.
 - staff needed help to prepare the evidence and present it in the right form but this could not be done by the Head (union and DfEE advice

to avoid a claim that the judgements had been made by the person who assessed the candidate's application form). This meant a false 'wall' where the Head linked to the internal trainer, usually a Deputy Head, who in turn linked to the candidate.

- that the direction to provide staff with the 1999 and 2000 PANDA emphasised the outcome measure nature of Threshold Assessment and tied the process into OFSTED.
- that the words highlighted during the training day were:-
 - a) evidence
 - b) rigour
 - c) satisfying the standard.
- that the appointment of external assessors was to force Heads to follow the script.

Overall, the group felt that we had been given a monumentally difficult task, one that was essentially about changing work conditions for teachers, disguised as reform under which the most effective teachers would receive more pay. Townley (1994) has described training as a 'nexus of disciplinary practices' aimed at making employee's behaviour and performance predictable. In training the Heads, the undercurrent was to outline calculable benchmarks and in the process show the Heads what was acceptable as manageable behaviour. The six Heads were aware of LPSH (Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers) and NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headteachers). Together with the Threshold Process a common theme was emerging; the idea of 'competency'. It was not accidental that the Hay McBer characteristics of a good teacher were widely disseminated by the DfEE during this period. Hay McBer's model of the skills and attributes that were desired from a competent teacher were hard to fault in the sense that the teacher in the model was admirable. Most Heads would want teachers to develop these characteristics. However, the model as used in The Threshold Process was concerned less with development and more with accountability. Seifert (1996) has written about Human Resource Management in Schools and indicated

that accountability systems are managerially acceptable because they permit schools to be seen as actively pursuing measurable improvement. A holistic and continuous co-working model (Hall 1995) is not tied to the target and objective driven methods that The Threshold Process represents but, unfortunately, despite being concurrent with the measurement model it was not the contractor's choice. They had been given a regulatory specification, a template of what a Threshold teacher must do.

The six of us began the slog of training staff when we returned to our schools. The second training day was as yet unknown to us because it had not been part of the original programme. At this point we were setting up school structures to prepare staff to apply for Threshold. I provided many pages of data for each teacher so that they could strengthen the evidence they had to provide. All teachers had two PANDAs (1999 and 2000), LEA data, YELLIS data, MIDYIS data, and our own internal data. I also provided a bank of information about what they had done outside the classroom. It was disheartening to me that staff I would classify as of excellent professional ability needed to be reminded of all that they did. I felt proud that they had done so much to the benefit of our community but sad that I was asking them to push themselves forward as something special when most did extra.

The Threshold Process is part of a National Standards Framework. For Threshold there are eight standards grouped into five areas. Some staff told me that they felt unworthy of Threshold yet in my view they easily exceeded the standards. From my perspective, it seemed that a few arrogant, less committed staff saw the application as straight forward, whilst some other more dedicated teachers had doubts that they were good enough. I shared the opinion with the other Heads who had similar experiences with

their own staff. Mahony et al (2003) has noted similar concerns. However, the prospect of struggling with the evidence base suddenly changed when further training was announced.

An Unexpected Day Out

The original timetable had just one day of national training for each Head. In May we were notified that all Heads would be given something described as 'Follow Up' training in June. We were aware that the NUT were unhappy with The Threshold Process. The NUT had started a legal challenge about the validity of the Secretary of State's change to teachers' Conditions of Service. They were also concerned that 'failed' candidates had no right of appeal. Even so, it was hard to understand why the unwavering certainty of the March training needed 'Follow Up'. It had been made clear to us that the guidance was to be followed and scrutiny applied to applications so that evidence and rigour were secured. We attended with interested anticipation, uncertain at what would happen.

At the same 'Grand' venue with more purple folders, this time we participated in what was called 'Follow Up Training'. The content and programme appeared much the same as the first training day. It focused on the Threshold standards and application process. The groups of the original training could not be replicated because some Heads refused to attend. The training was very different.

Each group had two trainers. There were no monitors. We were allowed to ask questions and – there and then - given answers. The new purple folder contained

fictional examples of Threshold applicants. One fictional example, in particular, 'George Earnshaw', was to be important in underlining the changes that had taken place in the period between March and June. 'George' became a metaphor for the change as I will outline later. As before, the data of this experience was generated by interview and group sessions. The notes were negotiated until they represented our view of the experience.

Despite discussing the second training day several times with my colleagues we cannot completely agree on why the message given so strongly during the first training day had become substantially modified. Our favoured explanation is what might be called a cynical one. The Government did not want chaos in schools with an election being planned for the next year 2001. Should that be true, it still does not explain why they took the risk of committing 'George Earnshaw' to paper. I would like to think that someone had looked at the work on stakeholders in the health service (Currie 1998) where development programmes had failed because of insensitive and mixed signals that resulted in professional values being placed in opposition to the managerial ones. Perhaps a politician had considered Public Choice Theory (Hamlin et al 1989) and woken up to the idea that institutions are not irrelevant as they influence individuals and in turn the individuals' rationality/actions are formed within institutional contexts. That work also highlights that the advisors appointed to give credence to reform are appointed because the advice they give is 'appropriate' and a notion of 'disinterest' is, at best, misplaced. However, my hope that these logical reasons prevailed is probably fanciful and the overriding reason for the change was a potential disaster for a Government openly pursuing public service reform. They wanted a way out of the mess.

Some common themes within new public management are about evidence gathering, value for money and consumerist language. Whether this is about redesigning the practice of Government (Power 1997) or visualising public services as mass production units that need to change as part of the post Fordist debate (Clarke and Newman 1997), It seemed to us that the purpose was about measurement and control. That had been the style of the first training day. The competitive edge that 'Great Britain' required would be assisted by cascading the imperative of change to the local school level where quality would be assured through internal (school) control operated by the Head. Robertson (2000 p. 143) suggests that the devolution movement to smaller satellites, subsidiaries or sub-contractors including schools can be regarded as a form of vertical disintegration. Government devolves tasks to the 'shock absorbers' at the point of delivery whilst retaining power and separating it from control. There is a licensed autonomy and the new agenda is determined and applied locally. However, the 'shock absorbers' either misread the message or were applying it too literally for the needs of central Government. At this point, changes in the conditions of service for teachers which had been the proffered solutions to the reform of teaching have in turn become the problem. If Heads followed the original rubric, then many teachers would not cross The Threshold because they had not provided the evidence as required. This, in turn, creates a major political problem. If too many teachers fail to move on the Upper Pay Spine parents of the pupils in the school, who are the same as voters, might ask what was going on. Some of the teachers may have been graded by OFSTED as 'good or better' so there was potential for litigation. A teacher highly rated by OFSTED might be prepared to challenge a 'failed' Threshold application in the courts. This is why 'George Earnshaw' had to appear. He provided the bridge between the systems-driven managerial model and a sense of collective endeavour. Someone had woken up to the

fact that the values of teachers were not always formulated in the language of managerial discourse. If rigorous standards were applied too many would fail. ‘George Earnshaw’ should have been called ‘Trojan Earnshaw’, he was the way to get inside the culture without being seen to back down or concede that the programme was flawed. During the afternoon of the ‘Follow Up’ session we were asked to consider four Threshold Applications and assess them. Three met the standard according to the guidance issued either well or at a satisfactory level. The fourth, ‘George Earnshaw’, did not in my opinion meet the standards. The pen picture in the training pack was unflattering. In the notes he is described as ‘coasting along’ and would like early retirement. These lukewarm comments pale into insignificance when compared to his application form.

Examples of ‘George Earnshaw’s’ responses on his application form:-

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Standard 1 | <u>Knowledge and Understanding</u> ‘I have attended Head of Science INSET held by the LEA’ |
| Standard 2 | <u>Teaching and Assessment</u> ‘my lessons happen’ ‘I draw upon a lifetime of experience’ ‘they will never become academic highfliers’ |
| Standard 3 | <u>Pupil Progress</u> ‘all of my Year 7 teaching is focused on crowd control’ |
| Standard 4 | <u>Wider Professional Effectiveness</u> ‘I have reached the stage of my career when I do not wish to consume valuable resources’ (A reference to INSET). |
| Standard 5 | <u>Professional Characteristics</u> ‘I know my age prevents me from understanding very deeply the motivations and habits of today’s younger generation’. |

These hardly seemed to be appropriate comments from an experienced and highly competent and deserving teacher. One of the intentions claimed by the DfEE for the Threshold Process was to recognise the skills displayed by the most effective teachers. 'George Earnshaw' informs us that he does not plan his lessons - they 'happen' - he concentrates on discipline, 'crowd control', and has little understanding of his students. Even where we had some level of positive response, it was still too weak to meet the rigour described as needed on the first training day. Further, it was not evidence based. The Heads in my group 'failed' 'George Earnshaw'. In the language of Threshold, this could be read as 'standard not met'. All five standards had to be met if the application was to be successful. But even with charitable good intention, 'George' failed to achieve at least three of the standards on the evidence of his application. It seemed an open and shut case according to the Heads' undergoing the training. In the examples provided, three candidates passed and 'George' failed. We were surprised at the response from the trainers. They appeared uncomfortable as they informed the group that 'George' could meet the standards if the Head found evidence for him. There was silence in the room. Based on the previous training and the details in the application pack that teachers were given, 'George Earnshaw' did not reach the required standard to cross The Threshold. Yet, here we were being told that he could pass if we assisted him. It was a contradiction; we had been told to be rigorous but now encouraged to pass an application who did not reach the standard set in the guidance.

The six of us met to reflect on the day shortly afterwards. There was a marked difference between the two training days even though the content about procedures had been much the same. The first day was about individual accountability. It fitted in with Investors in People approach that many schools have adopted to focus on individual

commitment to the organisation's overall performance. The systematic and effectively monitored improvement in the quality of individual teaching that had been shown to the DfEE (Teacher Training Agency 1995) as the way forward matched the original requirements of Threshold. Now 'George Earnshaw' was to be successful in moving to the Upper Pay Spine. Power (1997) has argued that consultants are used to implement all purpose reform that must appear to work, and that if 'standards' are a benchmark for securing legitimacy, then the standards must be met more often than not. It is an intriguing thought that the idea of audit shapes a public conception of the problem and the required solution so the technical routines have to be successful. Too many 'Georges' failing might make that impossible so the reform would founder. So why not change the criteria mid-way through the process to ensure success?

An argument that could also explain 'George' is found in Damanpour (1992). He argues that the size of the change has profound influence on successful outcomes and that when the process becomes over complex it is too difficult for the participants to hang onto. Certainly I and my colleagues felt that the strict format of the original training took no account of the complexities of our schools. Our second day of training suddenly introduced flexibility. Whether that flexibility arose from a fear that too many teachers would not meet the standards with a possible backlash from teachers and the public is hard to tell. What 'George Earnshaw' did was change the rules.

The 'Grand Day Out' had been controlled and very clear in the expectations it articulated. The trainers had told us that we must be rigorous and verify our decision on evidence provided by the applicant which would then be assessed by external assessors. The 'Grand' had moved to 'Grind' as we ploughed through the documents. Then

suddenly the unexpected 'Follow Up' had become more open, markedly less managerial and hinting at discretion for the Head. We moved to process the Threshold applications slightly dazed, somewhat confused and hearing different versions of events being played to various audiences/stakeholders. This was policy undergoing modification during implementation. More was to follow as the process was applied to our schools. The original instructions had changed. Mitigation of the stated requirements had started outside the school in order to meet a political objective as an election was being planned. As we implemented the programme, our task was to find a way to accommodate all the various messages. External mitigation was about to become internal mitigation. The implementation process was increasingly unclear. We went slowly forward with the process and waited to see what would happen.

Shard 7

Confusion, Caution and Collusion: Implementing the Threshold Policy in Six Schools

By Spring 2000 we should have been applying the Threshold policy in our schools. Unfortunately the 'follow-up' training had made us uncertain as to how we should proceed. This is how we made sense of the task.

The story of how the six schools involved in this study implemented the Threshold Policy is concerned with values, humanity, ethics and relationships. It is a story of 198 applicants (see Table II) and the six Headteachers charged with assessing each applicant's right to progress to an Upper Pay spine.

Table II

Applications for Threshold Round One 2000

| School | Eligible – applying* | | | Eligible – not applying | | | Failed |
|------------|----------------------|-----------|--|-------------------------|----------|--|----------|
| | | | | | | | |
| Central | | 37 | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Clifftop | | 20 | | | 14 | | 0 |
| Moorside | | 27 | | | 1 | | 0 |
| Northledge | | 37 | | | 5 | | 0 |
| Riverside | | 34 | | | 5 | | 0 |
| Valley | | <u>42</u> | | | <u>3</u> | | <u>0</u> |
| | | 198 | | | 29 | | 1 |

* Eligibility:-

Candidates had to be on point 9 of the Main Pay Scale on 1 September 1999. These had to be experience points not recruitment and retention or any other incentive.

Those teachers who were eligible but decided not to apply cast a shadow on the process. Those who were dissuaded from applying, usually indirectly by Heads who did not wish to embarrass them, lurk in the background. Six Heads with six separate views of the world operating in six distinct institutional settings reinforced the contingent nature of the threshold process. What they shared was the task; a duty towards staff, geographical closeness and secondary comprehensive status. The decision to work together provided a defensive alliance against the external assessors, and where local variations in concepts and ideas could be tested during the unfolding saga of threshold. Our sounding board which occurred in group meetings was often the Press, especially The Times Educational Supplement. This gave us a feeling for what was happening outside of our locale. We read it to track whether our experiences were being reported by others and felt reassured that often it appeared it was. National policy had percolated down to the school locality. Each Head was in the centre of and an active ingredient in this brew. This was not an abstract exercise; it was face to face with our beliefs, and the people we saw everyday. We were not only taking part in the process of reforming teaching, we were influencing the cultural tone of our local community.

Three behaviours emerged from the six Heads during the process of implementation though it would be more accurate to describe them on some occasions as emotions. I later collated them into three categories: confusion, caution and collusion. These categories were acceptable to my co-researchers. In my view the Threshold process has colonised our schools. Not all my colleagues would agree with that view, but the majority would. We have a foothold on new territory from which developments will come. The coloniser is performance pay. I feel that we have been duped like the Merchant Venturers who opened up the world in earlier centuries. They were promised

future riches in exchange for investing in the ‘company’. Some did become rich but not all. In reality these were often a ‘front’ for ambitious individuals and imperial expansionism. The Crown, operating at arm’s length, used the ‘company’ to secure overseas territory. Is this so very different from the Threshold experience? Teachers invested in the premise of a ‘modernised’ profession, and in exchange received an immediate pay rise with the promise of possible further rises at a future date. The programme was delivered by agents working on behalf of, though at some distance from, government. The result was a landfall on ‘terra incognita’. What future requirements/demands/expectations will come through that gateway into a new world can only be guessed at. Who will reap the rewards of this venture?

Confusion

Confusion has been either at the foreground of my work or hovering noticeably in the background of Headship since the Education Reform Act of 1988. Innovation and initiative have become pebbles thrown so frequently into the pool that the ripples that floated outwards have never subsided and the communities involved are never at peace. Threshold needed clarity, but it did not get it. Like the Merchant Venturers who sailed with charts drawn by those sponsoring the voyage, we set off with a package created by the DfEE and private contractors to support one outcome, the acceptance of performance pay. That our voyage also started in the fog was merely an additional hazard. Where were we going? Clarity may not matter. New places are unknown and this new way of working was unknown to teachers, so perhaps clarity was not essential. That is part of the confusion of Threshold; the message kept changing because the only constant target was to gain teacher submission to a principle of performance pay.

The first technical consultation paper supporting the modernising agenda (DfEE 1999, Section 2, pp. 20 and 21) indicated that there would be a new contract for teachers to include 'a further professional contribution' for those passing the Threshold. The same document referred to performance points being awarded annually and not consolidated. Neither of these proposals were implemented. For John Ponder at Moorside, this lack of legal 'bite' was not good. He wanted a contractual obligation placed upon staff to keep to the levels of commitment that had allowed them onto the Upper Pay Spine. The failure to create a new contract annoyed him greatly.

"This has no teeth and will be abused"

(John Ponder, Heads' meeting Spring 2000)

His stand reflected his leadership style. John spoke of 'outcomes', 'targets' and 'making things happen'. He agrees that these comments are indicative of his style, but claims that in moving his school from low to high achievement the style had been vindicated. For him the failure to provide penalties in the process was a weakness. He had felt that Threshold was a chance to 'get a grip', but he thought the opportunity was lost because the DfEE feared a backlash. He had accepted the consultation document as the direction to travel but that course could not be held.

The six Heads had expected any modernising of teacher contracts to reflect a strong market orientation. We assumed it would include the setting of targets, monitoring of performance using data and variable rewards for employees. Therefore, we had expected a universal, base-line, measurement about each applicant, with a starting level perhaps built upon an OFSTED/PANDA model. It came as a surprise then that the improvement data provided by each teacher could focus on anything including one unidentified student. That appeared to put the Head, as gatekeeper of the process, into a position of either tracking back every minor detail (I had 42 applicants) or asking the

line manager who was not obliged to co-operate, (there was no contractual requirement) or interviewing/cross-examining the applicant. It could not work. Anyway, we were picking up other messages.

The DfEE sent into schools small three-sheet documents about the modernising process. They were in clear plastic envelopes. Heads were asked to make sure these were put in the staffroom. A colleague Head joked:-

“It’s so that they can find your finger prints on the plastic”
(Graham Brown)

Humour can contain truth and there was a feeling that Heads and staff were being given subtly different messages by the DfEE. Heads were being told to ‘assess’; teachers, that there was extra pay. This was also a reflection of the lack of trust the process had induced. One of these plastic envelopes at the start of the process (DfEE 2000a) gave details of the new pay plans stating:-

“Success also means having access to a new upper pay scale”

In a ‘plastic’ folder two months later (DfEE 2000b) the message was:-

“If you are successful, and we expect most teachers who apply will be – you will get a pay rise of £2,000”

At the start of 2000 the inference was that you had to be a successful teacher. Two months later it had changed to ‘most people eligible were going to be successful.’ We could not see the direction we were meant to steer, apart from passing everyone.

There was just as much confusion about the continued use of the term 'good' teacher. The DfEE publish a 'Teacher' magazine. In one issue (Teacher, April 2000) Estelle Morris, the then Secretary of State for Education, argued that a rigorous and fair system for modernising teachers' pay would reward 'good' teachers. By June 2000, the magazine *Teacher* contained a guide 'How you can cross the threshold' (Teacher, June 2000 p. 9). Everyone eligible had become that vague 'good' teacher. Rigorous and Fair became 'The Reward you Deserve' (Morris 2000). However, it was possible that the Minister was equally confused since she described the application as a 'short form' when most staff complained that the six page form was difficult to complete. Teachers in the six schools reported that it took days to complete, not the claimed 25 minutes.

With confusion abounding over 'good', and our understanding of who met the criteria equally as confused, it could be expected that the internal training to introduce the process would vary from school to school. An additional INSET day was allowed in 1999/2000 to carry out this training. Closing the school for the day is rarely popular with parents, but this one was granted to ensure that all teachers heard the same information about Threshold. The videos and script that Heads had been exposed to, and some might say endured, during the first training session were to be shown to our staff. Many of the same jokes emerged about the expensive clothing of the teachers and their unqualified endorsement of the new pay structure. Harsher comments emerged about the external assessor during the training sessions. There seemed to be anger that access to the Upper Pay Spine could be blocked by someone who did not know the school or the work of the teacher in question and yet they had the right to over-rule the Head. This had also created resentment amongst the Heads. No uniform delivery of this internal training day emerged, despite the provided guidelines and videos. A

national process is finally delivered at a local site. However, a local context has a micro-environment, a set of interpersonal relations and a 'steer' from the Head. I have provided summaries of the initial training day that were negotiated with the Heads. These summaries are not detailed but rather a starting point of the process in each school. The summaries are the core of a much more involved activity. The 'bones' of the day in each school were:-

Central High – The training pack used in full as per instructions. Sessions led by the Head, Peter Williams. Peter made it clear to staff that not everyone might pass. Some wider discussion of what 'good' teaching entailed. He reported to colleague Heads that he intended to use the process to reinforce what he wanted the school to be. To ^{him} his staff

✓ Threshold was ~~described as~~ an opportunity to reward the best teachers. He had defined 'best' during training; it would be evidence based.

Clifftop – Charles decided to share the training day with the unions and make joint presentations. This was the school with highest proportion of eligible non-applicants for Threshold. The Head, Charles Whitbread, reported that at several points during the day it had become a discussion about the legitimacy of the process. Often discussion had been led by a union representative or had arisen from one of the eligible non-applicants who may have been attempting to influence others not to apply. The day was fragmented. The Head, was trying to deliver the pack in order to support the staff who wanted to apply and fulfil the instructions of the DFEE. However, he was having to do this against a background of hostility and disruption.

Moorside – John Ponder had a strong managerial stance in relation to the Threshold. He believes in systems and using them in his school. This was highlighted through the presentation. A policy of recruiting young staff had given wider acceptance to new ways of working and an openness to change. The DfEE training pack was delivered but there were also sessions by managers about collecting evidence to support claims. All staff were expected to develop portfolios of their work and accept regular classroom visits. From the description given at our Review meeting, this was the training day most akin to the first training session for Heads. It was about evidence, judgement and rewarding those seen as meeting performance targets. He had, of course, wanted new binding contracts to the staff to consistent delivery of the claims made in Threshold Applications.

Northedge – Graham Brown told me he was going to do everything by the ‘book’. He had doubts that all applicants could meet the standards, but if there was a wider policy view that ‘everyone’ was going to pass he was not going to create difficulties for himself by ‘failing’ teachers. To ‘fail’ teachers when he was now permitted to use his discretion would only add to tensions within the school. I sensed that Graham was not comfortable with the Threshold process as he believed that some teachers would receive an undeserved pay rise, an alternative to this would only deliver a level of upset within the school.

Riverside – Clear, though not highly regarded by the group. The DfEE want a form filled in and we are going to show them (the staff) exactly what to do. Both sessions were led by a Deputy Head. No discussion of the guidance was provided but examples were given on how teachers can successfully complete the form. The Head has no

concerns about the process, he intends to retire. Policy subverted by a personal agenda. A statement that all applicants will pass.

Valley – The largest number of applicants (42). Evidence was available from a recent very successful OFSTED. This made direct comments about teachers and subjects that were positive. Sessions led by a Deputy Head. Data widely available and staff directed towards PANDA data which is very positive for the school. Staff were shown how to incorporate as much ‘secure’ (that is unchallengeable) data into the application as possible so that the external assessor becomes irrelevant. An understanding of the process and its relationship to ‘modernising’ is given but the focus is on how to use the recent OFSTED and PANDA to make sure you pass.

In the fog of confusion regarding whether this was a rigorous process or a ‘hoop’ to jump through, the schools were each identifying their own directions using references to landmarks by which they could navigate this tricky voyage. The confusion arising from the training and official comments did little to help. If the Secretary of State, Estelle Morris, did not know what was going on, how could the schools make sense of the process. The process had started in March 2000 and was meant to have been completed by October 2000 for schools with large numbers of applicants and for smaller schools earlier (July 2000). There were complications. Teachers working in more than one school were unclear as to who would process their applicants. Other questions arose about flexible deadlines (there was a strict apply by date that was ignored by some Heads) and the amount of data needed in order to satisfy the requirements. Terms such as ‘chaos’, ‘confused’ and ‘burden’ began to appear in the press (Barnard 2000c, Mansell 2000). Heads navigating in this fog of confusion, slowed down as we became

cautious about the process. Why sail full ahead if you cannot see through the fog? Nagging at the back of my mind was 'George Earnshaw'. The changed criteria that his application had during the second training session indicated had obscured all the landmarks in a dense cloud. The sponsors had provided a navigation chart and then hidden the routeway in the fog of 'George Earnshaw'. Prudence slowed the Head's actions to a timid momentum just as a sailor would have probed steadily at an unknown foreign shore. Soon an event would make us stop at anchor. No-one was prepared to move until it was established who had the authority to authorise the threshold. It was not a mutiny, but it was certainly a time for assurance about what was happening. The foreign shore was hostile. I was not prepared to land on it until I was clear as to why I was bringing my people to this place.

Caution

There were always question marks about the real intentions or underlying purposes of The Threshold. Mahony et al (2002) have indicated that some Heads were very positive about it because they found it a useful tool for establishing a performance climate within the school. For two of my fellow Heads in this study, that is regarded as a reasonable position. Their situation resonated with Mahony's point. Peter Williams and John Ponder wanted to establish or reinforce a target setting performance driven environment. In this they supported the modernising agenda. Key words in this are individualism, enterprise, competition and ambition (Merson 2000). However, this agenda was surrounded by continued confusion about what the Government wanted from Threshold.

When the document '*Teachers: Meeting the challenge of change*' appeared from the DfEE in 1999, the proposition was that 'good' teachers should be paid more and that teacher career patterns were unnecessarily limited unless they left the classroom to become managers. This ignored the fact that even in the biggest schools few staff have substantially reduced timetables. They are managers in addition to their teaching. Nevertheless, this was attractive in that it would offer more money to classroom teachers and encourage people to consider teaching as a career just as shortages/recruitment problems were becoming a major concern. At the time of publication there was mention of new contracts and expectations. These were quickly dropped but they indicated a thought pattern. This was a 'strings' model. It was 'something for something'. Doubtless the crews of the Merchant Venturers realised that they would not go for a nice sail, pick up untold wealth and pop back home. Rather there was inevitable danger in going to unexplored places. Nevertheless they signed on. So it was with teachers. The Threshold Process was gaining momentum and becoming acceptable to teachers (Dean and Barnard 2000, Halpin 2000). So where was the danger?

One early scare (Dean 1999 p.5) was when the Local Government Association told ministers that 'more money equals more work' and stated that 15 days should be added to the contract of any teacher crossing The Threshold. This would have meant a Threshold teacher being contracted for 210 days against the previous 195. Again there was a rapid move by the Secretary of State to disassociate the process from these comments but a pattern was evident. More work, new contracts, higher expectations.

It was also suggested that teachers who did not cross the threshold if eligible would find their careers destroyed (Barnard 2000d p. 3). The thread of the argument was that Heads might regard these teachers as incapable of meeting the standard and, therefore, inferior. This view had legitimacy. If we had progressed to most applicants passing, those who did not apply or pass were unusual people and, by default, less attractive to employ. If they had not passed, there must be a reason.

Financial matters also needed caution. There is research to show that the modernising agenda is linked to the relative decline of revenues in the G7 economies (Robertson 1993, 1996). Staff might have to become more productive. Hart (1999) raised the issue of Threshold funding not being guaranteed beyond a three-year period. The six of us discussed this at length. Post-threshold staff have confirmed in their applications that they do more than the minimum so are paid more, but the cost of that added pay could become the schools' responsibility in April 2005 when the present grant arrangement ends. At that time could Heads legitimately expect more work of these staff, especially in a school like mine where the cost of the Upper Pay Spine would be over £100,000 per year? The six Heads did not have an answer. Richard Thomas summed up the feeling of the group:-

“If we ration as a response to future uncertainty about funding there will be industrial action. So just swallow the pill and hope it coincides with an election year.”

It will be interesting to see in 2005 if a fully devolved threshold cost arrives in schools. There will either have to be more money to pay teachers or cheaper teachers will have to be found. In both cases it would seem that productivity must increase. This will not be easy.

Doubts about funding, contracts and expectations were as nothing to the upset of July 2000. The National Union of Teachers went to the High Court and gained a ruling that the introduction of threshold was unlawful. Barnard (2000e p. 4) wrote that the 'judge, critical of haste and confusion' had ruled that the change to conditions of service requiring teachers, willing or unwillingly, to assist in a matter affecting salary, could not be approved by using general powers but needed formal consultation. The Threshold process stopped. We anchored off this new land to let the storm to blow itself out, after which we could assess the damage. How angry the Government must have been. After the initial training in March 2000 had gone so badly wrong, the second training sessions in June 2000 had introduced a degree of flexibility that permitted virtually any 'reasonable' teacher to pass. That 'reasonableness' measure was in the hands of the Head. They had quashed fears of new contracts and extra days only to lose it at the last moment because of a legal challenge from the NUT.

Teachers had been strangely quiet during the process. In the press, my research found few objectors, Whilwham (2000 p. 12) being a noticeable one. He called the process a 'creeps charter' but also indicated that union 'reps' had told him he would be mad not to apply. Mahony et al (2002) had noted the same attitude. Most teachers appeared to regard the threshold as a separate entity to performance pay, a one-off payment without extra commitment from them and there was even the prospect of further progression on this new scale. The NUT had rightly identified that it was a significant change to service conditions; one introduced without the right procedures being followed. After the confusion of the start, our caution had been justified. We were about to enter the final phase.

Collusion

I and the five Heads felt at risk from the Threshold because it seemed so unclear as to what we were expected to do. Heads had been led through the Threshold training process and nominated as the arbiter of suitability for threshold success within the school. LEAs and the Governors had been ignored. Neither of these groups were required to ensure the policy was delivered. Our recollection of the period was that the Central Government did not even bother to pretend that LEAs or Governors had a role. It just concentrated on the Heads. But now it appeared that we were being asked to do something that might be illegal. All Heads are also qualified teachers. As a result we felt very exposed to criticism if we acted illegally towards our teachers. We met. The outcome was unanimous. No more progress on Threshold until the legal position was clear. No matter what our position was on performance pay, all six Heads were concerned about this situation. The process was not legal so we would not proceed until someone cleared it up. Step by step, we edged closer to our teachers no matter where we had been standing before. For Richard, this was a return to the values of collegiality that the threshold process appeared to threaten by its spotlight on individual performance. For John and Peter it was a pragmatic decision to accommodate new circumstances.

The Heads' anger following the NUT action was directed at the Government. Typical of the Heads' attitudes was found in the TES 'look back in anger at this pay fiasco' (Hartley 2000 p. 15). The article by this Head struck a chord with me. He asked why no-one understood the law. The Threshold process had been drafted by high ranking DfEE officials, Ministers and a commercial organisation that had been paid millions to provide a framework and training for the policy. How was it possible for none of these

to have the wit to check if what they were doing was legal? There was fury tinged with relief. Fury that we had all been put under pressure to complete the process in an impossible time scale but relief that no matter what happened, now we had the excuse of the Government's illegality to show that the system was not properly thought out and that we were delivering it in an unfinished state that was not of our making. As we waited for the storm to pass we talked. The talk within each school steadily edged us back to the understandings that had made schools work over the decades. We were all at risk and that risk was reduced by standing together. It was a feeling of immense solidarity. Collusion crept out from the background of the process into the open daylight. Throughout the research I had recorded and analysed responses from the informants. As I looked at the most recent notes it was clear that more common ground was emerging despite the strongly held views of some participants. Dissent was reduced and it appeared that at these later meetings there was a move to act the same as neighbouring schools.

Collusion up to this point had taken several forms. There was talk in our LEA of collective applications where all the staff in departments put in identical evidence. There were certainly applications that were plagiarised. However, we had been instructed to assess the applications, teacher by teacher. So, if a few had the same phrases, it was of no consequence. More blatant was the report of late applications being accepted and that Cambridge Education Associates itself was colluding in fudging what had been laid down as an absolute deadline (Dean et al 2000). It seemed that the inflexible guidelines were considerably more flexible. If they were flexible for the contractor they were flexible at school level, especially as we faced the teachers every working day.

Five of the six schools involved in this research had used senior staff to help school applicants by proof reading forms and advising on improvements. The intention was to make sure the form was correct before it was officially seen. The school that did not has used its veto to ensure anonymity. For that Head, the application was a tool for coercion. He wanted teachers to be forced to declare what they did. For the remainder it was a hurdle to be crossed. Many staff did not need help but in the five schools using this approach it was a way of assisting colleagues whilst maintaining the fiction that the form had not been verified until it was submitted. It was about relationships within the school. One outcome was that it identified teachers who were comfortable with completing forms and those who were not. Further research is needed in this area, but if we are entering a period when the State will become a 'contracting engager' with public services, then either new skills will be needed by some existing staff or a serious dichotomy will emerge in staffrooms between those safe in the portfolio/data bank that they hold whilst others will be reliant on the benign interpretation of their work by a third party. John Ponder at Moorside argues that Threshold was an individualised version of the 'bidding' culture that has overtaken schools' Specialist Status, engagement with initial Teaching Training, and a range of other activities have required schools to go through a bidding process. Bids are only successful if the school complies with the application requirements. Threshold requires compliance to a stated standard, reinforcing a stereotype of that vague 'good' teacher concept. 'Good' teachers were being shaped by fulfilling the criteria of Threshold, a 'good' teacher complies with the behaviour outlined on the form.

Lurking in the broad category of background collusion were those who did not apply. 29 eligible teachers did not apply. 14 were at Clifftop where there was a stand against

the idea of performance pay. That was over 41% of the eligible population of that institution. Ethical difficulties make it impossible to use a breakdown of the discussions that the Head of that school had with these staff, but it was a remarkable show of resistance. Instead, I will refer to the 15 other non-applicants. All but one of these were persuaded not to apply. The Heads informed me that they did not speak directly to the staff concerned, but by nod, wink and implication they decided not to apply. These were staff who could not meet the required standards for a variety of reasons. Long-term absence by some made it difficult to demonstrate that the standard in question had been met for a period of up to three years. School value-added data had shown that some staff added no extra value, and in one case there were capability issues. Applications from those staff could only be passed by the Head being dishonest and taking a gamble that the external assessor would not select them for the sample batch. It was a risk that could back-fire for everyone. These were colleagues who did not meet several of the standards when the process required all to be met. I am proud that my colleagues, even those more assertive about management issues, by devious means made it clear that these staff faced challenges with Threshold. The choice was 'brutal failure' or 'avoid the issue and permit the pretence of the decision being their own. Teachers are entitled to be treated decently and with compassion. Years of OFSTED and inane comments in the media have not encouraged people to become teachers and the threshold process is just a further example of how measurement, judging and spotlighting individuals fails to acknowledge that teachers often have a team approach to much of their work. Collusion was becoming open defiance of the process. We were not prepared to destroy people who had given years of service with a six-page rebuttal of their ability to meet the new agenda of modernisation. If they could not pass on the tail of 'George Earnshaw' we would not disgrace them in public.

The NUT challenge delayed the process by many months. It did not recommence until late November 2000. For large schools with many applicants the process did not end until Spring 2001 because of extra submission time and the delayed external assessor visits. During that time collusion within schools and between Heads became more overt. A spur was given to this behaviour when local trial schools passed all the applicants. In the case of one school this was very surprising. The school had a poor image and was often cited locally as an example of what was wrong with comprehensive education. Yet all the applicants had passed. We understood the message. It seemed clear to us. Place this alongside 'George Earnshaw' and the 'rewards you deserve' comments from the Secretary of State for Education and we knew what was required. By now it was obvious that a general election could happen in the Spring of 2001, so we knew that staff had to be successful in large (voting?) numbers. The case for collusion was complete. The Government did not want a major education problem during an election and was prepared to allow most staff to be successful.

The six Heads agreed a strategy. Commitment to the strategy would vary slightly but the key elements were:-

- i) *Rejection of all or nothing requirements.* The Threshold application required that all standards be met. Most of the 198 candidates met the standards to a greater or lesser extent but for a few, one standard was much weaker, even though all others were sound. We resolved to tick the Standard Met box and defy the assessor to prove that we were wrong. Applicants had made it clear to them that improvement was needed in that standard area, but equally we were not going to fail them over a minor issue.

‘George Earnshaw’ had been a licence for the Head to pass applicants on the basis of personal knowledge about their ‘professional characteristics’ or ‘support for the aspirations of the school’. We could be equally loose in our interpretation of ‘Standard Met’.

- ii) *Rejection of the dominance of PANDA evidence.* The PANDA was the only document in addition to the application forms that we were required to provide to the external assessor. PANDA is produced by OFSTED. It is focused on exam performance against perceived intake. The view of the intake was formed with data gathered in the 1991 census. PANDA assumes that the census data was an accurate picture of the school intake. For both Charles Whitbread and Richard Thomas, the PANDA was seen as unfair. Charles has a very high proportion of households with graduates according to PANDA because that is what the 1991 census showed. Unfortunately, most of them are retired incomers to the area or send their children to private schools. Local council data shows his school to have the highest proportion of benefit recipient families but the PANDA only acknowledges that in Free School Meals data.

For Richard the PANDA fails to recognise that he is on a rail link to a selective school. Each year he has up to 25 very bright children reject his school by passing the 11+ and going elsewhere. However, the PANDA does not allow for this exodus. It regards those families as present in his school because that is their home address.

The remainder of us had more subtle reasons for rejecting PANDA. Since its introduction it has provided a year on year way of highlighting progress. Our Chairman of Governors is directly notified when it is published. As a Head I know the PANDA data is good for my school, but there will come a day when the results cannot be pushed up anymore. To sow the seeds of disillusion about the PANDA could be a useful 'hedge' against future upsets. Down grading its importance with staff stops them becoming obsessed about the students who select optional subjects. Overall, to question the validity of PANDA is a protection to the community. PANDA may, over time, become a more useful document as it will reflect more accurately prior learning but at the time of threshold 2000 it was still too vague and crude.

- iii) *Refusal to nominate applications for external assessors.* Heads could nominate who should be in the sample that the external assessor would review. With one exception we refused. If staff were selected by the Head it could suggest that they should fail, but that the Head was reluctant to be honest for whatever reason as some research had found (Mahony et al 2002 p.12). Deliberate failure to select other staff might hint at hiding weak candidates. Let the assessor select the applications, do not assist.
- iv) *Agreement to help the chosen sample to 'tidy up' data and materials.* Again there was one exception to this agreement. Otherwise, it was felt that those chosen represented us all and should have every support. My staff felt this very strongly and went out of their way to help colleagues. My sample group appeared to have no reason for being chosen other than listed

alphabetically at set intervals. In the event the majority did not need much help but it was a renewal of collective goodwill in an age of individual scrutiny.

This concordant provided a bulwark against the outside for our six. A recurring theme in our spasmodic meetings during the standstill period was the insult of having an external assessor to check we had followed the requirements. Successful Heads and years of experience could freely make a £40,000+ appointment to SMT but could not decide upon who should get a £2,000 a year pay rise. The NUT challenge had also gained a right of appeal against Threshold decisions but it was the Head not Cambridge Education Associates who would have to explain the decision. It defied belief that all those expensive employment specialists failed to incorporate such a basic right into the original structure, but worse still that the millions spent on the contract left the Head to answer appeals. In our group there was, increasingly, a feeling that we just had to get this out of the way. The delay, the confusion and upset it had caused made the threshold process something to be endured not welcomed.

External assessors turned out to be unimportant. Only 'Moorside' had an assessor who was not a serving or ex Head in the LEA. The assessor at 'Moorside' is reported as competent but anxious about making a mistake and so was very reliant upon the Head. The others were all known to us personally in the district. Ignoring the obvious contradiction of Heads paid to lead a school having the time to do verification whilst also assessing their own applicants, the experience was unsatisfying. Applications were discussed during a visit when sample evidence was

reviewed but no other action was taken, apart from agreeing that the Head had made the right decision. It was rubber-stamping. Threshold has lost its impetus and we were all tired of it.

Throughout the period we had added to our Threshold implementation workload by our need to meet and discuss the research. The analysis had required me to sift through transcripts, write, re-write and codify the responses until I was clear about the meanings of my colleagues and then negotiate a collective view where appropriate. Across England Threshold had been a burden but for this group there had been the extra work associated with the research. I had collected data throughout the period. For my colleagues the pace was slowing but for me the next round of analysis and writing up was beginning. It would be one of write, re-write, redraft again and then again as I checked the narrative with my informants.

In Spring 2001 we met to reflect upon and sum up our experience of Threshold. The programme to introduce the performance pay structure to teaching would have been helped if Threshold had followed an agreement about annual target setting instead of preceding it. However, the process to reform teaching had fallen victim to political imperative. Confusion about the mixed messages had fostered caution and then collusion as the Heads felt exposed to danger. A sane Merchant Venturer recognises that he shares a common destiny with the people who sail with him to the unknown shore. The Crown is in London; we are facing the local situation here together. That is why Heads acted with decency towards weak candidates and wove a barrier between staff and the harshness of the policy so that it would not damage those who came into contact with it. I trust those I know, I trust less those I do not

know. Six schools, six Heads mediating a confused policy. As the matter unfolded it had become clear that to make performance pay work there had to be an overwhelming number of staff with a vested interest in making it work. 'George Earnshaw' did well, 97% of applicants were successful. Some did not like this and it was seen by the Tories as a pre-election giveaway (Halpin 2000b), in other quarters as a 'sham' (O'Leary 2000). They missed the point. Whilst we had 'passed' most applicants, in part as a response to the confusion during training, and in part because we were acting reasonably towards teachers, performance pay had been secured. Every successful application was an individual signing up for new conditions. We had landed on terra incognita. Our push into the new paradigm for teachers' work may contain as many dangers as those faced centuries ago by wealth seeking Merchant Venturers. In the long run it was the Crown/Government that gained the benefits, the same could well apply to threshold.

Bruised after the ordeal of implementation my colleagues and I gathered to reflect upon our experiences and draw conclusions from our research. The conclusions from our Spring meeting spilled over into a series of group and individual reflections (Table 1 page 61) as we sought to make sense of the experience. That story will be told in one final shard.

Shard 8

How We Stumbled Across the Threshold but Remained Fearful of the PANDA:

Conclusions on Round One of the Threshold Process

The conditions structuring the nature of teachers' work in England has now changed as a result of the introduction of the Threshold. These changes, outlined over a series of shards in this dissertation, can, I would argue, be seen to represent an historic shift; an eroding of the conditions for teachers that have been secured over the course of much of the last century. In this final shard, I want to draw a set of conclusions about I/we, myself and my colleagues in this small part of England, have summed up the Threshold process.

Round One of the Threshold Process finally ended in Spring 2001, six months later than planned. For a small number of applicants deemed to have failed, the appeals process would drag on a little longer, but for our six schools that was not an issue. I have used the term 'stumbled' because that is what it felt like. The process lacked smoothness and came to a conclusion in a jerky stop-start almost accidental fashion. It seemed like that to us, despite Government claims that Threshold was an integral component of the new professional structure under which high performing teachers would be paid more. The sheer number of applicants in the first round made it hard to consider Threshold as anything other than a one off to be endured and survived.

We were exhausted after 18 months of this process. Threshold had been a phenomena that had, it seemed rampaged through our professional lives. It had lurched through changes of direction, caused tension in our schools amongst teachers, and created

distress amongst colleagues. In the debris of the aftermath we collectively and individually reflected upon the experience. It is that reflection that is the basis of these conclusions. The conclusions are themselves the outcomes of analysis. That process has included coding transcripts, checking back with informants, grouping responses and then testing them against the understandings of the participants. It is my research but I wanted the 'voices' of the other Heads to be heard. From the process of recording, refining, redefining and cross-referencing a narrative of the Threshold experience has been produced.

The multiple meanings of the word Threshold was symbolically indicative of the complexity in understanding the process. A threshold is a point of entry like a doorway, a beginning of something like a new era. It also has two medical/scientific definitions. It is the lowest limit at which a stimulus becomes perceptible or the highest point at which pain is bearable. Between them, these meanings provide a metaphoric flavour of the range of our experiences. Just noticeable, the painful limit of what we could endure, a new style and a complete change of employment characteristics, were reflected in our multiple experiences. There is a further meaning that conjures up a ghastly image. The threshold is what a bride is traditionally carried across to start a new life. Was this a powerful government sweeping up the teaching profession and carrying it into a new place and new relationship? Whether we were violated in this new relationship by compliant agreement or subjected to it by force, depends on individual views about the Threshold process. Our views also, varied across time as the period of implementation unfolded.

The conclusions to this narrative enquiry have been agreed amongst our group. They are the consequence of a difficult and time-consuming set of discussions and their ongoing refinement held over the period since the Threshold process ended. This reflexive work took place during the process and did influence how we came to and managed the Threshold Process. At the same time, there was a further set of conclusions which have arisen from a shared post Threshold analysis. As the person responsible for this account, I have edited and synthesised the different and at times differing points of view. The fruits of this editing have been broadly agreed with and by my colleagues. At the start of this research we agreed that research is not an 'objective' activity. Further, that while one 'account' would be told in this discussion, each of us would have our own view of the 'event' as it unfolded. Having said this, I am also greatly relieved to find that other researchers working on the Threshold Process have identified similar concerns. I was not afraid to stand alone, but the similar findings by other researchers is reassuring to us that our practitioner's perspective is also reflected in the wider research literature that has been published. This in turn gives my/our own research greater validity.

It was important to my self-esteem as a practitioner/researcher, and a personal reward for the great effort put into this work that this research has integrity and independence and that in its own way it adds to the body of knowledge about the Threshold process. That, I feel, has been achieved since our conclusions are echoed in the research work of others. Ours, however, is a local account both generated and told in a way that focuses attention on the political and personal. The 'originality' of my research is to create a space where the 'voices' of those implementing Threshold could be heard. It is an account constructed by the actors at a personal and institutional level. This is what we

experienced and this is what we saw happening to us and the teachers we worked with in our schools. It is an account of how the Threshold Process has changed our working lives.

After negotiating our way through the analysis I and my colleagues have decided to concentrate our conclusions on three main areas; (1) the operational dimension; (2) the human responses to the experiences and (3) the future? – that is - our interpretation of where this might be leading. In short, these conclusions focus upon what had to be done under instruction from central government, how we (Heads and teachers) and our people felt about it and where we think this process is leading teachers.

The Operational Dimension reflects our conclusions on the technical and external factors of the implementation. Once the intensity of work to complete the Threshold was over it seemed a strange and distant event. The six of us Heads had met regularly and worked through the experience, both agreeing and disagreeing, often anxious about what we were doing for a variety of reasons. But, all facing the same basic task; to implement a strategy devised by central government to reward teachers who met, or were judged to have met, certain criteria with additional pay and access to a new pay scale. It was the Heads who had to make Threshold work, the Heads had been the midwives of performance pay. Yet, once the process was over it was difficult to explain to outsiders how the experience had dominated our professional lives. Explaining to others is always one step removed from the experience and is similar to describing an intensely personal moment to someone who will never understand the importance of the events because it is not important to them in quite the same way. Perhaps Threshold is

like that. It ricochets around my brain, it is in the mind of my colleagues but is already regarded by others as history.

In an earlier shard to my narrative account, I have outlined dissatisfaction with the training programme that preceded Threshold Implementation. Several research paper (Chamberlain et al 2001, Wragg et al 2001, Croxson and Atkinson 2001) have confirmed that Heads throughout England were very unhappy about the training programme. Wragg's work has put forward the view that the majority of Heads, 57%, criticised the training as poor, some stating that it was the worst training they had received in their careers. What is common across all the papers is the rejection of the scripted mechanical delivery by ill-prepared trainers who, in some cases, had completed training on a Sunday to deliver the package to Heads the following day, Monday. That was also our experience. In the post Threshold analysis, it is hard to understand why the government department most directly linked to learning should permit such a badly planned delivery. To answer that question two explanations are offered. The first is to do with the contracting arrangements. The second concerns the personnel involved. Our group of six were alienated by the training. We became either hostile to, or less supportive, of the strategy. However, if our conclusions are correct, our support for our hostility to the training was not important since the thrust of the process was to introduce performance pay. In that sense, a successful conclusion was reached for the Government.

Threshold was delivered by private contractors. The DfEE was the customer but mechanism of delivery was a commercial contract between the DfEE and three main commercial contractors. Mahony et al (2003c) believe that the extent of private sector

involvement in education is largely unknown. Even when private sector involvement is known about and clearly of commercial advantage to the company concerned (as in the recent purchase by a major publishing company of a controlling interest in an examination board) we, teachers and educationalists, somehow overlook the obvious commercial advantage in such actions. We make an assumption that everyone involved will behave properly. It is as though involvement with education or government is, in itself, a cleansing factor, one where the conduct is assumed to be ethically and morally correct. A commercial organisation has a duty to shareholders that is at odds with a service culture found in education where many teachers believe they have social as well as education responsibilities. That is not to say that the delivery of Threshold was corrupt in any way but, rather, that in handing this significant project to private contractors central government absolved itself of blame for any failures. Commercial contracting of Threshold also reflected a changed style of operation for the Government in education. Mahony et al (2004b) have written about 'edu-business' being present during the Threshold process when the boundaries between the public and private sectors became increasingly porous and blurred. Threshold was delivered by a company using a project management style. It was a package from outside not developed from within the education establishment.

The main contractors for Threshold were Hay McBer, CfBT (Centre for British Teachers) and CEA (Cambridge Education Associates). In some cases, people who had previously worked in education were employed by the companies. This did not seem to mitigate the commercial approach. Hargreaves (1994) describes teaching as an emotional business and these ex-teachers appeared to have lost that emotional sense. Whether these contractors communicated with each other is unknown. It is

understandable if they did not as they were commercial rivals. It might also explain the disjointed nature of Threshold. Each contractor had elements of the package to be delivered, but a coherent overview had to lie with the central government. The intervention in teaching was hidden behind the shield of the commercial company, a company enabled but not empowered. They delivered the contract to a price and specification. This highly significant process, however, was funnelled through a 'what will work' approach (Menter et al 2003). Menter has also suggested (to the surprise of us Heads) that the contractors were involved in developing the policies. Our surprise is that we knew that the consultation prior to Threshold was limited and somewhat predetermined because of the nature of the questionnaire. One of my colleagues said "If the first consultation question is "Should we pay good teachers more?" we answer "Yes". The rest of the questions become irrelevant because we have agreed to differentiated pay". Limited consultation with those most affected by the changes led us to believe that time pressures were paramount. We had no knowledge that contractors were being consulted by the DfEE to develop policy in this area.

On reflection, Menter's claim that the contractors helped to develop the policy makes sense because it would explain some of the shortcomings, though having said that I do not want to give the impression that government never develops policy with shortcomings. The customer here was the DfEE. What the contractors gave the DfEE was exactly what the DfEE wanted; a cost/time driven package to introduce performance pay. Issues of quality and effectiveness were not at the forefront of the specification. My belief is that time was the most important factor. The Labour Government wanted to be seen to address teacher employment issues sooner rather than later because of wider electoral politics.

Whilst training of Heads was a major operational problem, it was not the only difficulty. The contractors had suggested 30 minutes for assessment per application. Wragg's research shows that the average secondary head spent 1¾ hours per application. That meant I should have spent 70 hours assessing my 42 applicants but in fact I spent over 100 hours. We wanted to give staff every opportunity to present themselves well and spent time to be as supportive as possible. The beliefs I used to assess the applicants were about fairness and probity, but these were not the beliefs that undergirded the new process. This new process is a simple 'right' or 'wrong' assessment; the standard is met or not met, the document is the focus. To us it verges on patronage at one level and on victimisation at another. Poor training and a badly structured implementation delivery meant that Heads were individually interpreting the requirements. The contractors had constructed a programme that could not be delivered in the manner they anticipated.

Several other technical issues arose. Chamberlain et al (2001) have commented on the application forms, and many of the Heads using them found them ambiguous. We found the same. Most schools had spent some time in training staff and continued to intervene in application completion far beyond the time suggested by the contractors. Research (Croxon and Atkinson 2001) indicates that many Heads had doubts about comparability of standards in assessing teachers across schools. This arose as a result of the ambiguity in the process and because the training was confusing. To protect teachers our group decided that confidentiality was vital. In turn that meant that the consideration of evidence was individualised and the interpretation of the requirement unique to each institution. In essence, at least in this round, a nationwide programme was modified at the institutional level.

We six resented the time this took, as did our teachers. In part we felt that the paperwork was a commercial model being applied outside a commercial culture. Assessment can be quickly completed if the measurement is simple. The last commercial firm I worked in did not care what you did as long as you made a profit. Without being precious about our colleagues, we all believe that teaching is more complex. Mahony et al (2004b) have argued that Threshold simply placed service values against profit motives (p. 288). Many teachers do much that is not open to easy measurement. This will emerge in the human dimension of Threshold. In the final event, our concerns were not put to the test because 97% of all applicants were successful. However, during the process we felt uncomfortable and insecure. The external assessors might have overturned our decisions. This brings me now to the operational matter that, after the training, caused us the most distress and anger.

External assessors from Cambridge Education Associates had to check our work. Amongst our group there was simmering discontent about this. The principle of having our work checked by an outsider, and our teachers evaluated by someone who did not know them, was not acceptable. What were they? Spies to check the Head's work. As reported earlier the assessor visits were unimportant because not a single application outcome changed for our group and nationally the figure was less than half of one percent. What the BBC News (2001) called 'money wasted' was one reason for the anger. Rumour had it that £300 per day was the minimum pay for an assessor. Certainly our group knew one assessor who boasted that he had so much work that he was earning part-time what he had earned full-time as a Head. This we regarded as a waste. Heads had done all the work on assessment but it was Cambridge Education Associates and the assessors who were being richly rewarded. If £300 per day was

correct, then Cambridge Education Associates must have made an enormous profit with a lucrative contract in order to pay that sum out to the individuals concerned. Government figures will claim this to be spending on education, but schools have received only marginal benefit from the expenditure. Schools are used to, and accept, accountability, but this is accountability for public consumption/reassurance, not effective audit. It fitted the category of being seen to do something, and while it is possible to regard this as the assessor ensuring moderation across assessments and schools, in these circumstances it seemed wrong to us. Caught up in a highly charged environment of low trust, it was hard for us to be gracious and calm. Instead the process was regarded by us as deeply cynical and not one that we felt willing to support. There was also a sub-concern about assessors. When we discussed the concern, we were not sure how to note it but I have used my discretion (which was written into our original agreement) to record it. This concern focuses on the external personnel involved with both training and assessment. In many cases, and we have no reason to believe that our experience will not be replicated elsewhere, they were ex-Heads or LEA advisers for whom, sadly, we had little time. They were part of the new divisive culture which in turn had hugely affected teacher morale and teacher attitudes. These ex-Head and LEA advisers had left the teaching service, yet they were back making judgements about our schools. The contractor was outside the environment and using some whom we did not respect. It was as though OFSTED now had a junior cousin. In our area, when the names of the various assessors were released to us, we knew that there would be no question of them challenging our judgements (though clearly they could) because they lacked credibility. They were being paid to do a task I felt they were not fit to do. My awkwardness over reporting these feelings is centred on worries that I could be considered arrogant or even jealous of their good fortune.

However, we doubted their ability. This may be a very localised set of circumstances. Other research (Wragg et al 2004) has shown assessors to be regarded in a positive way by Heads.

Bennett (1999) has written about a whole new industry of external assessors and ratifiers. The result is more bureaucracy rather than less, while more paperwork is produced to justify the role of regulator. There is a growing external assessor population associated with Performance Management, Specialist Status and OFSTED. On this occasion, the assessors were passive when faced with dangerous situations. Sometimes these external assessors are demanding but this was not the case with Threshold. I have been unable to find amongst my many secondary colleagues a single example of an external assessor viewing a lesson. This had been a contentious point with the unions, and whilst it remained in the school visit specification, I feel that the assessors were afraid to risk trouble by entering the classroom. When we as a group reflected on the experience, we sensed that the assessors felt vulnerable about going into classrooms or probing evidence too deeply; rather they preferred to tick the boxes, leave the site and collect the fee from Cambridge Education Associates. As Mahony et al (2004b, page 291) suggest, Threshold is about certification and standardising teaching so the assessors certified and left. We sense that Cambridge Education Associates wanted to complete Round One as smoothly as possible. In five of our six schools the assessor was known to us. That may have influenced the assessors' behaviour, though we cannot believe that our experience is too unusual as to be substantially different to elsewhere. Given the need to find many assessors quickly, it is likely that other areas of England had similar experiences. At the secondary level, the £300 does not appear to

have been money well spent. In our area it certainly did not provide assessors who had the professional gravitas to influence Heads.

As a group of Heads, we were aware that we wanted it both ways. Our reflections led us to criticise the failure to adhere to a private enterprise style even though we had been critical of the expensive locations of the launch training. Perhaps the inclusion of 'educationalists' as trainers and assessors was intended to reassure and comfort schools but, instead, it looked half hearted and it certainly lacked credibility. Instead, the private contractors ended up with some of the old faces we trusted and many we did not working in a style and on an agenda that we did not want.

Overall, everyone won at the operational level. The government succeeded in delivering the project by using private contractors. Part of the logic of the new governance is to privatise services by using non-government organisations who operate at arm's length from the executive. Harris (2002) has opined that this process is beginning to impact on policy and research communities so that research becomes a way of providing 'evidence' to justify a modernising agenda. This is then used to provide a new agenda for changing teachers' work. In that sense the schools won. Virtually everyone passed the Threshold. The eligible teachers gained extra pay but, in doing this, they became aware of what the national priorities were and had to accept that data emanating from central government and its acolytes, particularly PANDA, were now the registers of truth about teacher performances. For that reason we believe that the poor training (some colleagues would prefer the term fiasco!), the loose documentation, the ridiculous time pressures, and the grubby episode of external assessment are of no consequence. Ironically, our view is that operationally, the

Threshold Process was a success because we, Heads, made it so. In their own way most Heads had tried to mediate the process, on one hand to deliver the requirements while at the same time protect and support teachers. Amongst our group most of us had ensured that those teachers applying were successful and that the paper work required by Cambridge Education Associates was delivered. The operation of Threshold will change but the impact upon the human beings and their beliefs and values remains an area of concern in our six institutions. The operation required teachers and Heads to confirm by signatures their awareness of the national priorities. There is no denying it now, we have contractually signed to support them but those priorities are set outside our schools.

The Human Response outlines our conclusions on how implementation impacted upon those involved in the process. The Threshold process was challenged and its introduction delayed by the NUT on a legal point but, otherwise, teachers appear to have been very acquiescent about a new pay structure and its associated performance management. This contrasts with the introduction of individual performance agreements in Western Australia where there were teacher strikes and withdrawal from voluntary activities (Robertson and Chadbourne 1998). The low-key response of teachers in the English setting may be based on a number of factors. For many teachers this was only 'more of the same'. It was in essence more form filling, more regulations and more change pressure from a government that claimed it intended to slow down the rates of change and concentrate on the initiatives already started. Unlike Western Australia, our teachers and schools were already beaten, as a result they were apathetic about resisting new professional working patterns. There seems to be a feeling of "what's the point, they have the power". From our discussions we sense these changes

encouraged a “keep your head down” response. For Heads there is a tendency to do the same. Structurally we are located between the teachers, governors and the LEA/DfEE and, somehow, we have to meet all the needs of the various groups. We too “keep our head down”. There is also broad resignation to the fact that whilst league tables have vanished from Wales and never existed in Northern Ireland or Scotland, they will remain in England. Now “naming and shaming” by DFEE and OFSTED has moved from institutional level to include individuals. This is despite the confidential nature of the process and the success of most applicants in crossing the Threshold this time. We have concluded that there have been three significant human responses to Threshold. These are seen through behaviour of Heads, the spectre of teacher professional behaviour becoming myopic/manipulative and the worry that some individuals have been harmed by the process.

The five Heads involved with me in this research had been primed for an intensive period (March – October 2000) to complete the work Threshold required. In the event the legal challenge by the NUT delayed the process into Spring 2001. During the extended period our views and behaviours seem to have coalesced, which is a surprise given the differing views held by the individual Heads within the group. On reflection, we now agree that the delay made us cautious and more thoughtful about what this was all about. The delay, confusion and poor initial training gave us time to talk and, in talking, we defined our concept of Headship in this new and changing setting and appropriate behaviours to support that concept. My perception of those meetings is that the harder line that might have been adopted by some of my colleagues was in turn mediated and changed through the group discussions we held in July 2000. And, while I recognise that these are six separate interpretations as a result of six institutional

settings, there was also common ground, some of which emerged as a result of our common experience. The climate had become one of mutuality. In many respects our shared teaching background was coming to the fore. The private contractor had designed a package to the customer's specification that had some weakness in it, particularly concerning training and accurately defining the meaning of each standard. But if the original timetable had been maintained, they would have been of less importance as the inertia of the programme swept us forward to completion of the directed task. Delay meant that the certainty was questioned and new positions taken. The Heads recontextualised the programme. The extra time required government ministers to put effort into keeping the programme moving after it had stopped rather than maintaining the impetus of the original push. In our group we still had different views about our management function, but our actions became even more similar as time went on. No-one wanted to be the pathfinder; we sought security in a commonality of approach.

The first change was in the use of data to support our teachers' cases. Surreally, we almost became like 'dodgy' salesmen offering fake goods at knockdown prices, but the goods on offer were 'nice looking data'. We pushed our colleagues into using data to prove their case, so making 'data' more powerful than we would wish to. The Threshold wanted claims based on data but schools do much that is not quantifiable. Staff were advised by our intermediaries to concentrate on the performance indicators such as KS3/KS4 results. Menter et al (2003) note that what the popular media describes as 'spin' is a factor in Threshold as schools become restructured internally by the need to prove their worth. For some of the six, it was enough to claim that OFSTED praise, Achievement Awards and PANDA evidence proved our worth, but for others the

need to overcome PANDA's negative data about pupil achievement required effort. If the centrally held data is in the schools' favour, then everything appears possible. But, if it is against the school, it indicates underachievement, from here there is a mountain of prejudice to conquer. The government would argue that using the overall categories in the Threshold guidelines relating performance to school circumstances permits variation but the PANDA grades against similar school criteria so E* is still E*, the lowest possible rating and difficult to explain. The result for some schools within this group was that claims were made that went unchallenged. I would stress that the claims were not dishonest but, instead, selective. Wragg et al (2004) have indicated that some data appears to have been 'misrecorded'. That would indicate dishonesty but within the schools of this research the matter was one of selection and not deception. Mahony et al (2004a, page 146) have confirmed in their research that Threshold has encouraged a measure of self-surveillance where evidence is kept in case you ever need it which in turn is likely to be evidence that is positive for the individual. In the new environment, we elevated marginal data and that, in turn, had an impact on teacher attitudes - something I will refer to later.

An amusing outcome of the assessors' visits to schools was that a report from Cambridge Education Associates was sent to the Chair of Governors about the process within each school. All the group had reports that included terms such as 'a data rich environment' because that is what Cambridge Education Associates had trained the assessors to look for. Assessors had abandoned any intention to see classroom teaching. It seemed that government suggesting that most teachers would be successful in crossing the Threshold and the teacher unions were indicating that they would challenge any 'failure' cases. If the assessor could find sufficient data to avoid confrontation then

it enabled verification of the claim. We all needed to be 'data rich' to let the assessors off the hook.

A second concern about our behaviour grew out of the fear that accompanied Threshold. My five colleagues are all experienced Heads; they are not afraid to challenge vested interests. But, we have begun to change our practices. We encourage staff to keep additional records so that they can demonstrate their individual contributions. We have become concerned that without individual teacher evidence, claims cannot be verified. If we cannot certify evidence that our individual teachers are doing a good job will we be criticised as ineffective leaders? At the same time, we are also concerned that our actions mean that teachers will take on tasks that have no benefit to the children they teach. That may not be a bad thing, and is practised by newly trained, staff but it dissipates effort. Over time, the resources diverted to 'covering one's back' will have an impact on school life. If Heads in general feel that they have to prove they are policing the Threshold standards, more paper and time will be generated, with little likely impact on the pupil experience. A teacher whose paperwork is poor may do more for a student than one with immaculate records but I and my colleagues can no longer allow that to happen. We have to encourage teacher compliance. Threshold has started to alter the way Heads can behave. In our group we felt that we had become data 'junkies' and 'pushers'. Self-preservation was forcing us to direct staff into time consuming analysis and recording of their own performance to produce evidence in case it is needed. Fear of failure, or more accurately fear of being unable to prove success, is starting to drive teachers' actions. It is also now a prime motivation of Heads. Collectively, we Heads feel uncomfortable and perhaps a little ashamed of this. Menter et al (2003) have noted two possible responses to the Threshold. One is for the teacher

to get out, the other is to get through. It is that latter pragmatic response by some teachers, whilst understandable, that worries us.

Whilst assessing the Threshold Applications, it became clear that some teachers had been very selective in their claims. This was not the selection of data mentioned earlier but rather 'cherry picking' of kids in anticipation of proving a case. Given the guidance from the application pack, the unions and the schools, this is hardly surprising. What did shock us as the verifying Heads, was the way in which some evidence/claims were provided minimal information. The claims were not false but rather that they did not show the full picture. The reference point was something akin to when a teacher asks a class to produce seven pages of work. That is what Threshold was for some people. They did what was required and no more, but the Heads did more to ensure they passed. These people passed, the lesson was not lost on them or others. Just enough is satisfactory! They might repeat that approach at every point of the five points that form the Performance Management Structure. What might have been created is a self-centred, boastful and individualistic teaching force in place of professional respect and collegiality. This group of teachers are still a minority but I feel it likely that year on year this group will grow in number. Most of the Heads involved in this research supported the notion of a pay rise for teachers, even if it was only achievable by the politically viable route of Performance Related Pay suggested elsewhere (Croxon and Atkinson 2001, Wragg et al 2001). It favours those who know the right answers. This is not the same as doing the right thing. Failing such staff would have been impossible to defend at appeal because they had met the standard, but they met at a lower level than others whose professionalism we admire, but they are still through. Threshold forms were an 'on/off' tap, not indicators of quality. We suspect that these teachers will still

continue to concentrate on their own needs and shape their careers by the benefits they can gain. An incentive system encourages this perspective. These teachers' careers could be professionally myopic and manipulative, verging on the dishonest. From another perspective those teachers do only what the government requires but that is not the service we want or the teachers we need in our schools. The teachers we need are the teachers that have been most damaged by Threshold, the reflective and self-critical practitioners. For this group the process of Threshold has been emotionally harmful. I regret to confirm with the agreement of my colleagues that our impression is that this group has a gender base, they are mainly women. Since completing the research and during the process of writing up the dissertation I have found that research by Mahony et al (2004c, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) has identified a similar gender specific bias in the Threshold Process. The Mahony and Hextall (2000) research had indicated the potential for bias, the later Mahony et al work found it present in the process as did my own work.

Women are now in the majority in teaching. In all of the six secondary schools involved in this project they form over 50% of the staffing. The long-standing concerns over the lack of women Heads is not being pursued in this work, except to observe that members of the Leadership Group paid on the Leadership Pay Spine did not have to complete Threshold. That automatically benefited more men than women. The numerical details are not available to us but we would note that in some of the junior schools within our academic councils the only person not completing Threshold would be the male Head. However, our concerns were focused on our own staff.

Earlier I reported how staff could be selected to be reviewed as part of the sample when the external assessor visited. We did not nominate staff but we all scrutinised the sample list carefully when it arrived in school and breathed a sign of relief to see certain names. Those names were usually female. It is an indication of working practices that we felt secure with some staff and worried about others. Equally, it highlights the banality of performance management systems. Making a minimum standard, the lowest common denominator approach, fails to recognise quality but perhaps the government wanted quantity to make the system work. Quality may be a future push from the centre but during Round One, the push was quantity because of the politics; the power of the vote, and the pressure of maintaining the teaching force in the face of low morale amongst staff.

Our various experiences are synthesised into this narrative. Again, we are greatly encouraged that other research (Mahony et al 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004c) has identified similar concerns. My sample list, when it arrived, contained three female staff who I knew had immaculate paperwork. Their applications had been very good, almost too much evidence. There was no question that they were deserving of Threshold. In part this is because, as the Mahony et al (2003b, 2003c) research has reported, women tend to be more meticulous, giving time and care to the process. Other sample teachers were not as prepared; but some did not really care. The 'George Earnshaw' factor was becoming known and given a recent OFSTED inspection of the school showing that they were at least 'satisfactory' they had no doubts that they would cross the Threshold. They did not know that the same OFSTED had shown that the majority of 'excellent' grade teachers were women. My sample highlighted the unevenness of the process. The women had burdened themselves with preparation and

detailed evidence on top of all the extra work they were already doing. Male applicants had also put in good applications but proportionally there were fewer. Despite reassurances that the application needed no special effort, this process had become a burden. This pressure was unfair. It seemed like part of the whole continual degrading of teacher professionalism. In one school involved in this research there was resistance to Threshold and there has been a report of opposition in urban areas (Maguire 2002). Most, however, absorbed the pressure.

For specific teachers, we know Threshold was emotionally destructive. One teacher in my school completed the application form then went on sick leave never to return. The merits of the application are not the key issue with this teacher but rather that she has become alienated from the system, marginalized and removed from the work she was doing. If economic factors are one of the reasons for the government introducing the process to ensure 'value for money', then this teacher indicates a loss. We can ill afford to lose staff when finding teachers is more and more difficult even in popular areas of England.

Another teacher exemplified other dangers contained in Threshold. A very good teacher, on the sample list, she became obsessed with how she would 'prove' her merit. The Head concerned had passed her and had no doubts that she met all the standards. However, she started to panic that she could not prove her case. As the assessor's visit came closer she became ill and had to be sent home. Her work was lost to the school for the period of ill-health. The assessor confirmed the Head's judgement but, for her, it had been one 'knock' too many. Her confidence was gone and her classes had to be

taught by a supply teacher until she recovered. She was harmed by this new turn in the audit culture.

Mahony et al (2003a, 2004c) have outlined how many of the respondents they interviewed found the process painful and damaging. This Threshold process has heralded annual which to alienates teachers. Like OFSTED, the data required by the external agencies is never quite what is being used by the school. It always has to be produced in a revised form so all teachers have another task imposed upon them. Teachers are not compelled to apply for Threshold but it is expected. It is rather like a non driver in a motorised society.

Reflecting on the *Human Dimension* of the Threshold Process has been depressing. As Heads we were making people comply with a process about which we have doubts. It is a process that is obsessed with pupil progress data; especially the data that can be verified from outside. We are afraid not to do it because we too feel under scrutiny. Data has become a driving force in our professional lives but, in gathering it, we use scarce school resources and in using it we play into the hands of those who believe that there is only one thing that counts, and that is data measurement to show change/improvement. This is the audit culture in the public sector so well described by Michael Power (1997). This 'Doubting Thomas' approach must be upsetting to schools who, when struggling with enormous problems, are told that the KS4 results are below average. They know that the Chief Inspector of Schools knows this too and that it has been recognised in his reports, but the PANDA has no flexibility. You are either above average, average or below average. If below you must improve. The data the government trusts is the data it receives directly from the private contractor Forvus. It is

exam data. Everything else is viewed as subjective and, therefore, not accurate. The implication here is that Heads and schools cannot be trusted to be professionally honest.

At teacher level we conclude two broad issues. First the possibility of the growth in a 'Jack the Lad' teacher culture in the profession. This is the type of negative impact on school culture found by other researchers (Mahony and Hextall 2000). He, and it is usually a male, does enough to meet the measured criteria and no more. He knows the standards and does what is needed to pass. This is not the teacher I want to work with. It is an approach that centres on gaining kudos as an individual not part of a team. Threshold talks about working with colleagues but the process focuses on how an individual can show their achievements. The careerist will do well out of this system. They have always been present in schools but Threshold seems to justify their attitude.

The second issue is far more worrying and has been hinted at when outlining the sample procedures. At worst, some teachers are being harmed emotionally by this process and at best are overworked. She (they are mostly female) is often too modest to shout her own worth and feels pressurised by having to show, often yet again, that she is doing a good job. She over produces evidence, agonises about quality and spends time trying to get it right on top of everything else. She internalises her feelings and diminishes her contribution to the team effort. In the worst cases she is so harmed by this that she cannot continue and the service and pupils lose out. Making people ill or unable to cope does not enhance performance, it detracts from it. Threshold and the associated Performance Management trivialises much of the work done by teachers to simple progress measures that are verifiable when significant actions are not. It is also unjust because it rewards those who claim the most when often their success is supported by

the work of others. I have mentioned earlier that Mahony et al (2004c) found similar gender issues and emotional damage arising from the Threshold process.

The Future - Some early research on the impact of Threshold on teacher perception (Marsden 2001) has shown that teacher morale remains low. We saw that in our schools and through our contacts in other schools from every respondent to our enquiries. The idea that 'good' teachers deserve more money and can earn it by filling in a form seems to have been accepted. Menter et al (2003) have noted a view suggested by the supporters of these reforms that the changes will make things better, but who knows? This could be the educational version of the Emperor's new clothes. Innocents can see that there is nothing in it but all the interested parties are afraid to say that there was no substance to the event because the edifice will then collapse. The assumptions of Threshold are that (1) performance can be meaningfully and accurately measured, (2) that rewarding the 'good' teachers will improve the quality of education and (3) that teachers will respond to financial rewards, are at best questionable. If they were without question why was the consultation so hurried and respondents unheard. Why was the policy developed in closed meetings in conjunction with private companies? And why did the policy wobble so badly during training and implementation? In the broadest sense, the policy was rescued by being implemented regardless of the people involved and by conceding that all but the most incompetent of teachers would pass (George Earnshaw!). After much thought, we had to conclude that the policy was as much about a new way of working for a modernising Labour government as it was about individualising the power of work of teachers and breaking the power of collective bargaining.

During a seminar at King's College, Bottery (2003) described how new Labour is determined to be seen in control. The government fears being described as incompetent because that is a charge levelled against the party in the past. Fear of not being seen as in charge has created a low trust environment where the regulatory apparatus of the previous party is continued and used to ensure power. Calculation and performativity are embodied in targets taken to the individual level by Threshold. In our opinion, this recognition of the 'good' teacher has backfired. What this research appears to say is that we do not trust you to do the job, you have to provide evidence that you can do it and then the person who knows your work well, the Head, cannot be trusted to assess you fairly so in turn his/her work will be checked. Just as with OFSTED there is little hope of challenging the external assessors' judgements but in reality that is unnecessary because the regulators are too afraid, too compliant or just overwhelmed by the task to do more than rubber stamp the Head's decision at least for the moment. That may change in the future. We have a remarkable situation. In order to fulfil its contract the private company charged with introducing a national system of performance management has left the standard to be decided at school level in order to fulfil the contract and avoid financial penalties. It has seemed to us a kind of madness. The meaning of school communities is ignored; the social capital of our schools is tampered with, and then we are left to sort it out. However, we feel that there are other major casualties as Threshold leads us unto a modernised profession.

Threshold is highly centrist in its nature. Threshold was conceived, managed, funded and administered by the DfEE. LEAs had no involvement in Threshold. By using private contractors on short-term lucrative contracts, the government was able to direct the policy from the centre without having to go through elected members or paid

officials in local government. At school level it had to be delivered by a Head pressured into co-operation by a paradoxical combination of fear, retirement threats, and desire to reward the teachers. Central government did not need to win over the doubters; it ignored them. The private contractors even had a veneer of people who professed the public service ethic but were paid to deliver the contract to a profit schedule. LEAs should recognise that Threshold shows that they are redundant if schools can be managed and funded by direct control. The behaviour shown towards the Heads could be described as moving along a continuum from bullying pressure to helpfully encouraging, but it worked. We are not aware of any school where Threshold Assessment was not carried out.

The quality of the private contractors has been discussed elsewhere but we feel their use, coupled with OFSTED, may start to influence what is taught and even how it is taught. The PANDA is the key to this. The image of a panda as cuddly is ironic. They are often bad tempered, large and potentially dangerous animals. They are not cuddly, neither is the OFSTED PANDA cuddly. However, that is the document Threshold Assessors were provided with and then used to judge pupil progress. Note these phrases:-

Provide information on:-

- ‘Attainment – broad overview and at relevant ages/key stages comparisons with national averages: table showing average NC level by subject and gender (for age 15, attainment in comparison with national averages; Post 16 if relevant); the performance of boys and girls; trends over time.’
- ‘Attainment at relevant age/key stages in comparison with schools in similar contexts: all relevant pages from the main report.’
- Value-added progress within the school (from 2000 PANDA only) (paragraph 3, page 1 Threshold Standards instructions to Heads)

DfEE March 2000

- Does it show appropriate progress? Does the evidence presented show a pattern of consistent progress – on a value-added basis – for the great majority of pupils relative to their prior attainment and expected achievement?
(paragraph 4, page 3 Threshold Standards instructions to Heads)

DfEE March 2000

Those phrases are Threshold instructions to the Head requiring highlighting of the evidence. These notes refer to PANDA data. The concentration on pupil progress in the PANDA, particularly the contentious value-added issue gives us cause for concern. There is a danger that some teachers will act unprofessionally to secure improved PANDA data. The irony here is that while on the one hand the effort to reward individual teachers is met, those who free-ride create a new feature of potential opportunism. Private contractors, by comparison with an LEA, might know little about a school or its history due to the fact that they visit once a year to assess and even in the largest schools it is usually a fleeting visit. They do not have continuity. What they know comes from the PANDA so perhaps this will further encourage a utilitarian approach to teaching, a producer approach where the maximum through put gains PANDA improvement. Some teachers will be encouraged as a result of this new set of conditions to do what it takes to gain data improvement, not what they think to be professionally right. Threshold and the PANDA's bite is another step along the road to the status of teacher technician. Threshold is like poking a real panda with a stick, the response is paradoxically predictable and unpredictable. To secure results, and it should be noted to allow the government to meet its own target; one answer could be to adopt subjects that have high pass rates when compared to other subjects. I am conscious that sounds like media studies bashing, a strategy favoured by the Daily Mail but there are signs that some schools are veering away from traditional 'hard' subjects in order to improve result data. That pragmatic response could be a just reward for failing to trust teachers or respect their professional status. If true it is likely that the professionalism

of teachers is not valued. Rather output figures became the new preoccupation as they ensure the desired targets are met. Not surprisingly, this encourages a do just enough mentality. Some schools might move to try and 'select' the intake in order to boost results figures.

Threshold cannot be uninvented. It has happened and its long-term consequences are as yet unclear. If we consider the education system to be an ancient building that is being refurbished and modernised, can we trustingly accept the word of the architect that all will be well? Until the scaffolding is removed we are not sure. Threshold is the same. This is where our concerns as Heads and educators are most keenly felt. We cannot see the final form. To be sure, Threshold has achieved a remarkable shift for government with regard to teachers pay and work conditions.

Post Threshold we have a performance pay system for the teaching profession in England. There are now two classes of teacher, main scale and upper scale. In the case of the latter, application to cross the Threshold is acceptance of performance pay with pupil progress being a key factor. Pupil progress is judged on a platform of data gleaned from the PANDA, an OFSTED document. We have schools bowing to the power of OFSTED to articulate and describe their performance. It appears objective and scientific but the national census data used to construct the PANDA may be a decade out in its data and errors have been found in each PANDA issued to the extent that OFSTED now classify the PANDA as invalidated or validated. Increasingly OFSTED, a regulatory arm of government, judges the school on subject outputs and by default judges the subject teachers through KS3/KS4 results. Not only has the PANDA bitten, but its teeth are well and truly hooked into the teaching body. We pander to its

power because we have nothing else to hold up against the data it contains. The PANDA is not going to let go and we cower before it. Each school is judged against an expectation based on PANDA data. We have no control over the production of the data or the means to effectively challenge it. The challenge should come out of research like this and the considerable body of work by Mahony et al (2004a, 2004b, 2004c) but our fear is that we will be ignored because our research does not support the Government's view.

Performance pay has created the potential for localised pay arrangements. National agreements exist but Threshold permits individual pay deals to grow and perhaps became the norm. At the moment, such deals have been held back, but national agreements have been circumvented by delivering a policy that excludes the greatest number of employers (LEAs) and goes straight to the Heads. Having succeeded once, the trick can be repeated. The message is clear, do not waste time with the LEAs that employ teachers. Put in a temporary contractor, deliver the process and then leave it as a potential routeway to achieving other policies. LEAs can no longer expect to be consulted if the government is determined to show it is in charge. Heads will become the 'fixers' of the new code of employment and will reward those who most forcefully press their individual cases. This may be fertile ground for lawyers to make more money from education as employment law cases flourish.

Waiting at the edge of this process is the matter of funding Threshold. Government grants are being made available until 2005 to support the costs, but beyond that there is no guarantee that costs will be met. If funding falls, then Heads will have to decide who is rewarded and who is not. A hollowed state has pushed the responsibility to the edges

of delivery so that arguments over rewards are localised ones not national. It remains to be seen if the unions will accept that but for LEAs and ratepayers the expense could be significant. Can we have schools declining to meet contractual obligations or going bankrupt? Wragg et al (2004) indicate that funding concerns were reported by most respondent Heads in their research.

Threshold is not the only policy applied to schools. When it is placed alongside work force remodelling agreements and the Specialist Schools programme it is possible to argue that the existing comprehensive system is being dismantled. Threshold allows the richest and most successful schools to pay more, using resources from Specialist Status. Work force remodelling agreements permit non-teachers (Higher Level Teaching Assistants) to take Foundation Degrees and pursue qualified teacher status. A multi tiered system could emerge. Wealthy schools with Specialist money attract ambitious career focussed teachers who are well rewarded on an Upper Pay Spine. Less wealthy schools retain the ambitiously modest and the lower grade teacher. Parents will soon know about this and want what are better teachers. The outcome is a tiered system. The various policies, by design or accident, might arbitrate on where resources go and the quality of experience for pupils. There is the potential for a more polarised system. The PANDA has gained enormous power. We might have stumbled over the Threshold but we are now inside a new profession. Esau sold his birthright for a mess of potage, for teachers' professional autonomy it was £2,000.

I do not have a romantic view of the past when all teachers were perfect and the structures ideal. There have always been weaknesses. I remain uncertain that the Threshold is the best way to address these weaknesses.

I conclude this narrative with a moment of reflection about myself and the group. During the Threshold Process we formed an alliance, even though our views of Headship were different. The implementation was like a see-saw, at times we agreed, at other times we disagreed, but we completed the task. However, those differences will continue to influence our responses to Threshold and Performance Management. I realise that my identity is based on a service (Doing Good) approach whilst some colleagues hold 'Entrepreneur' (Doing Well) identities (Robertson 2000 p.210). These Forms of Realisation are not compatible. I will resist individualised contracts, some colleagues will not. How do I act fairly towards my teachers if I hold these beliefs? They have a right to expect rewards that are on offer. Such rewards will be available elsewhere. The collective interest has been broken and in the process, too, the meaning of my Headship damaged. Can my community survive in the new circumstances or are we now 85 individuals pleading our own case? This narrative needs to continue until the new meaning of my Headship is clear. The shard of ice I am standing on is becoming smaller as the integrity of the service is melted by the new 'heat' of individualism. The reflection in the broken mirror of school collectivism is distorted and the shard that represents me looks fragile. We are in a new era, I and my colleagues have crossed a significant threshold.

APPENDIX I

THE THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT STANDARDS (DfEE 200b)

To cross to a higher range for experienced teachers, applicants must meet eight National Standards in five areas. I have summarised them as:-

1. Knowledge and Understanding

Standard descriptor:-

- have a thorough and up to date knowledge of the teaching of your subject(s) and take account of wider curriculum developments which are relevant to your work.

2. Teaching and Assessment (three standards)

i) Standard descriptor:-

- plan lessons and sequences of lessons to meet pupils' individual learning needs.

ii) Standard descriptor:-

- use a range of appropriate strategies for teaching and classroom management.

iii) Standard descriptor:-

- use information about prior attainment to set well-grounded expectations for pupils and monitor progress to give clear and constructive feedback.

3. Pupil Progress

Standard descriptor:-

- as a result of your teaching your pupils achieve well relative to prior attainment, making progress as good or better than similar pupils nationally.

This should be shown in marks or grades in any relevant national tests or

examinations, or school based assessment for pupils where national tests and examinations are not taken.

4. Wider Professional Effectiveness (two standards)

i) Standard descriptor:-

- take responsibility for your professional development and use the outcomes to improve your teaching and pupils' learning.

ii) Standard descriptor:-

- make an active contribution to the policies and aspirations of your school.

5. Professional Characteristics

Standard descriptor:-

Challenge and support all pupils to do their best through:-

- inspiring trust and confidence
- building team commitment
- engaging and motivating pupils
- analytical thinking
- positive action to improve the quality of pupils' learning

Each Threshold applicant declared that they met these standards and provided evidence to support that claim. The Headteacher was then required to confirm that any claims were correct, derived from the applicant's own performance and was representative of their overall performance.

APPENDIX II

SAMPLE QUESTION SCHEDULE USED IN GROUP INTERVIEWS

27 March 2000: GROUP INTERVIEW

TIME: IMMEDIATELY POST TRAINING SESSION (now known as
 training session 1)

LOCATION: Hotel Lobby

PRESENT: Richard, John, Peter, Charles, Graham (Peter left early)

Questions:-

1. Which group were you in?
2. Could you distinguish a reason for being in that group?
3. How many others in the group?
4. What instructions did the trainer give at the start of the first session?
5. How did you respond to the instructions?
6. Did you have any 'visitors' during any of the sessions?
7. What did they do?
8. Were the comments about the training process from
 - a) the participants
 - b) the trainer
9. Do you believe participant comments reflected your views or were widely held?
10. Did the training and the material provided provide a clear understanding of how to implement the Threshold Process?
11. Has your understanding of the task become clear?
12. What words would you use to describe your experience of the day?

13. Has the training met your needs?
14. Any comments on the venue?

NB This was to secure a snapshot of the immediate response to the training session a short time after it finished. It was followed up by one to one interviews. Responses were analysed, coded and then fed back into individual interviews and further group work. The individual sessions were not led by structured questions, they were of conversational style. The data gained was later produced in a narrative form to connect events and informant responses into a meaning of Threshold as understood by me, the researcher in context. The data was shared by this group but I had the responsibility for the final 'voice'.

APPENDIX III

SAMPLE OF INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS SCHEDULE

One to One Research Agreement Interview After Participation Agreed

TIME: Various times until early March 2000 ie prior to national training

LOCATION: Participant's school

PRESENT: Participant and me

Questions

1. How many of your staff are eligible for Threshold Assessment?
2. What proportion is that of your total teaching body?
3. Are there any staff who have indicated they will not apply and if so why?
4. Are there staff who you feel should not be applying and if so why?
5. From the information received so far, do you feel you understand what is required of you? (This question was re-asked after training to see how views had altered or progressed).
6. The information contained in the PANDA seems to be of importance. How do you regard the PANDA for your school?
7. Some union people are calling this 'performance pay'. What are your comments on the idea of performance pay?
8. Do you think Threshold is performance pay?
9. What do you regard as measurable performance in your school?
10. Do you think the DfES has a view of what performance is? If so, what is it?
11. Are there any reviews or evaluation arrangements currently used within the school?

12. National training sessions begin shortly. What do you anticipate you will learn in the allocated sessions you will be attending?

NB These questions were asked when agreement to participate in the research had been given but before the national training. It was to try and capture views before being exposed to the DfES material and to assess whether at this early stage differences in approach were apparent.

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